DAVID F. MARLEY

Mexican Cartels

An Encyclopedia of Mexico's Crime and Drug Wars

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AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MEXICO'S CRIME AND DRUG WARS

David F. Marley

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Contents

List of Entries, ix

Introduction, xi

A–Z Entries, 1

Chronology, 315

Glossary, 321

General Works, 325

Index, 327

List of Entries

Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI)
Aguacates, Cártel de los
AK-47 Assault Rifle
Allende Massacre
Altiplano Prison
AR-15 Rifle
Arellano-Félix Organization
Artistas Asesinos

Badiraguato
Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle
Beheadings
Beltrán-Leyva Organization
Body Disposals

Cabañas Shooting
Calderón Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesús
Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki"
Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel
Cardinal Posadas Murder
Caro Quintero, Rafael
Carrillo Fuentes, Amado
Cocaine
Cochiloco
Colima Cartel
"Condor," Operation
Cuinis, Los

Derecho de piso
Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS)
Drones

Ephedrine Intercept

Familia Michoacana Cartel
FEADS
Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel
Fox Quesada, Vicente

GAFE
GANFE
García Ábrego, Juan
Guadalajara Cartel
Gulf Cartel
Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas
Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"

Heroin

Iguala Mass Abduction
Infantería de Marina

Jalisco Nueva Generación, Cártel
Jardines del Humaya Cemetery
Jesús Malverde
Journalism
Juárez Cartel

Kaibiles

Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto
Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos

Mano con Ojos
Mata Zetas or Matazetas
Methamphetamines
Milenio Cartel
Monterrey Casino Attack
Mossberg Shotgun

Narcocorridos
Narcomantas or narcomensajes
Narcotanques
Noreste, Cártel del

Oaxaca Cartel

Plaza

San Judas
Santa Muerte
Santería
Submarines

Tepic Strafing
Tijuana or Arellano Cartel
Tunnels

UEDO
UNAPROP
Unión Tepito, Cártel de la

Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie"

Zeta Original Gunmen
Zeta Gulf Cartel
Soldiers
Zeta Cartel
Zeta Vieja Escuela

Introduction

The only thing worse than organized crime is disorganized crime.

—Sanho Tree, drug-policy expert with the Institute for Policy Studies (September 2014)

Overview: Mexican Cartels

Until recently, these criminal enterprises were sprawling multinational syndicates directed by a drug lord with his coterie of close relations and longtime friends, employing a security chief, *plaza* bosses, intelligence operatives, telecommunications specialists, arms procurers, financial managers, political liaisons, gunmen, assassins, torturers, etc., to supervise many far-flung groups or cells performing outsourced tasks:

- **growers** of heroin or marijuana
- **manufacturers** of methamphetamines and opioids
- **importers** of cocaine or ephedrine
- **acquisition teams** for purchasing and assembling raw narcotics in bulk
- **refiners** to render these raw ingredients into more highly concentrated drugs
- **transporters** to move large high-grade loads undetected by land, air, or sea
- **military and law enforcement collaborators** to ensure safe passage through Mexico
- **smugglers** to pass loads into the United States, either in vehicles such as light aircraft and fast boats or through drones, tunnels, etc.
- **fixers** to rectify any problems by bribing or threatening customs agents or police officers, and retrieving intercepted loads
- **distributors** in American cities to stockpile and apportion individual packets for sale by local street-dealers
- **money launderers** to extricate tens of millions of dollars in profits, without leaving a paper trail.

The vast majority of these specialists were not cartel members, but rather retainers—although any attempt to switch allegiances or be poached by rivals would be dealt with violently. And as with other large corporations, cartels employed many other auxiliaries such as lawyers, architects to design and build fortified houses, engineers to bore underground tunnels, mechanics to customize armored vehicles, pilots to fly planes, etc. Criminal bosses often acquired many legitimate businesses as well, such as restaurants, nightclubs, auto dealerships, etc., all contributing toward cartel income.

However, no cohesive structure ever truly characterized the Gulf, Juárez, Sinaloa, or Tijuana Cartels during their heydays; instead, they presided as umbrellas over huge, fluid networks with tens of thousands of employees and affiliates. Many of these feeder-groups fought or engaged in other crimes, knowing that their cartel association would shield them from police action or prosecutions. Closer inspection revealed an anarchic and unpredictable patchwork of subsidiary groups with little or no direct contact to the core syndicate, often shifting because of deaths, arrests, leadership changes, ambitious underlings, feuds, financial losses, splinter cells, territorial realignments, political fortunes, rising or declining strengths, and so on.

Conflicts also spilled over from powerful allies or enemies within the government, each pursuing their own agendas, who could steer police or military actions against one cartel or another [a charge often leveled against the well-connected Sinaloa Cartel boss Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán]. Many drug-war participants were in fact double agents working with one group or faction against rival traffickers or political opponents. Even the U.S. border agencies—apparently a well-planned, unified force committed to one mission—were rent by competitive jealousies, rumors even swirling about alleged collusions. Moreover, despite their billion-dollar budgets, these agencies seemed incapable of stemming the tide of smuggling, leaving many career-agents discouraged and disillusioned.

Overview: Mexican Police, Army, and Navy

Arrayed against the cartels are a host of equally disparate police forces, split up among Mexico's 2,400 cities or rural municipalities and 31 states, plus the federal government's multiple branches, an estimated 450,000 officers serving in 3,000 different units or departments—mostly low-paid, unskilled, badly-armed amateurs defending isolated outposts. Worst off are municipal policemen, often shunned as pariahs and social inferiors within their communities, therefore vulnerable to threats or bribes from much better–armed, well-heeled criminals. In September 2016, Jalisco's Attorney-General Eduardo Almaguer would complain that roughly one in five municipal officers within his state actively collaborated with gangs in their jurisdictions, and another 70 percent "did not act" against them, adding that 1,733 Jalisco policemen (nearly 16 percent of all municipal officers) had failed evaluations known as "loyalty tests" aimed at rooting out corruption.

State-police forces are better armed and equipped, especially in more affluent states, yet still prone to cartel influence or intimidation. Federal law-enforcement agencies are the most robust, but tempted more assiduously by cartel offers for that very reason. The Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP), a uniformed paramilitary force created during 1998–1999 by merging the Federal Highway Police, Fiscal Police, an Interior Ministry intelligence-unit called the Investigation and National Security Center (CISEN), plus military personnel transferred en masse from the Army's Third Military Police Brigade, was quickly penetrated and eventually had to be supplanted by the Policía Federal or "Federal Police."

And the latter soon succumbed as well, its commissioner, Facundo Rosas Rosas, announcing in Mexico City on August 30, 2010, that 3,200 of his 34,500 officers had been dismissed from service for failing

lie-detector, toxicology, and other tests known collectively as "trust-control exams," part of an ongoing purge which had commenced that same May. Another 1,020 faced possible disciplinary action, while 465 more were being subjected to judicial investigations for suspicion of direct involvement in major felonies—including four midlevel commanders from the border-city of Ciudad Juárez accused of corruption by their subordinates during a mutiny staged earlier that same month (about 250 of these rebellious officers furthermore being under investigation themselves).

At this same press conference, federal commanders complained that one reason it was so difficult to impose proper ethical standards was that corruption still reigned in state and municipal forces, which were completely beyond their control. In the past, sweeping federal dismissals had been criticized because fired officers simply found work with subsidiary forces, or even sometimes joined drug-gangs. Rosas added that his particular batch of dismissed Federal Police officers would be barred from any further service and monitored so as to prevent them from turning to crime—although their spokesman, Juan Carlos Buenrostro, promptly countered that they "had not been sacked for corruption, they just failed the tests."

For more than a century, the federal government had deployed Army units whenever policing grew problematical, and as of 2002 it had begun sending heavily-armed squads of elite new GAFE special-forces into hot spots to make arrests of drug lords entrenched within fortified mansions. These units' superior training and firepower ensured many early successes, but the cartels soon found senior officers within the Army High Command willing to provide telephoned warnings of impending raids for generous rewards. [For greater details on these elite units, see "GAFE" in the main text.]

As Army morale sagged, a disappointed President Felipe Calderón in December 2009 turned to the Navy's much tougher *marino* special-forces, who would rack up a string of impressive high-profile detentions with no breaches of security. [See "Infantería de Marina."] Yet despite the deaths or captures of 100 of the 129 most-wanted drug lords over the next three years, analysts questioned this strategy of targeting kingpins—leaderless groups simply fragmenting into smaller constituent cells to resume smuggling and fighting, so that the number of murders rose appreciably (including 1,300 decapitations) as an otherwise successful campaign produced "fewer drug-lords, but more violence."

His successor in office, PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto, adopted a less aggressive policy as of January 2013, even initially announcing that local and state authorities would no longer work directly with U.S. agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Administration when it came to sharing intelligence, plus discontinuing the practice of staging "perp walks" of captured drug-bosses before news-cameras (which many of these wealthy criminals loathed). It would even be suggested that Peña Nieto's administration preferred a triumph by the less brutal Sinaloa Cartel over such sadistic thugs as the Zetas, and deployed federal forces accordingly. Nevertheless, violence had become so ingrained that despite his campaign-pledge it would be reduced dramatically, 116,000 homicides were recorded during his administration's first five years—an average of 23,300 homicides annually, nearly 4,000 more than during Calderón's first five years in office—and these figures have only continued to rise.

A

The night belongs to us.

—Omar Treviño Morales (Z-42),
Zeta Cartel boss

Aerial Spraying—see "'Condor,' Operation"

Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI). Mexico's short-lived "Federal Investigative Agency," originally a replacement for the corrupt Policía Judicial Federal (PJF)—only to itself be ruined by criminal infiltration.

Policía Judicial Federal (1908–2002)
The oldest federal police-force in Mexico, created as long ago as November 17, 1908, during the dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz and based upon law-enforcement practices then in use in France. Its officers worked in conjunction with *Ministerio Público* or "Public Ministry" prosecutors in investigating crimes and gathering evidence, for attorneys to then lay charges and try suspected perpetrators in court. The prosecutors could furthermore issue warrants for the apprehension of specific individuals, with the Judicial Police making the corresponding arrests. Their jurisdiction encompassed all of Mexico, comprising 13 "zones" with a total of 52 smaller regional headquarters, each working in conjunction with its assigned federal prosecutor. All 13 zones were headed by a PJF "second commandant," who in turn directed the activities of his subordinates in the 52 outlying branches. Arrested suspects were placed at the disposal of their respective prosecutor, who would then designate subordinates to assess and act upon each case.

One of the smaller law-enforcement agencies as Mexico entered its modern era, the Judicial Police would triple in size from 500 agents in 1982 to over 1,500 two years later. Then in 1988, as crimes involving narcotics began to escalate, a special Assistant Attorney-General's Office for investigating and combating drug-trafficking was also added to the PJF's mandate, leading to the hiring of an additional 1,500 agents. This office was expanded even further two years later and given interagency-coordinating responsibilities in the battle against the cartels but soon became steeped in corruption—the Matamoros trafficker Oliverio Chávez Araujo famously commenting in 1991: "I've been able to cut my way through all the Mafias, but I can't against the 'Charola' gang," the Policía Judicial's nickname. Between December 1994 and August 1996, 1,250 members—22 percent of all PJF personnel—were arrested for a variety of connections to drug syndicates, and the force had become widely despised as one of the world's most corrupt police-forces. [The common Mexican epithet for a Policía Judicial agent was *judas*, a reference to Christ's treacherous disciple, Judas Iscariot.]

Creation and Activation of the AFI (2000–2002)

When Vicente Fox of the opposition National Action Party (PAN) was elected president on July 2, 2000, his victory marked an end to decades of entrenched Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) misrule. During the five months before being sworn into office on December 1, 2000, he and his advisers prepared a series of ambitious reforms, one entailing replacement of the long-discredited Federal Judicial Police with a modern new force, better equipped to combat the growing strength and pernicious influences of drug-gangs. Standards within the old PJF had been allowed to fall away badly, its 5,700 agents being:

- poorly and irregularly paid
- indifferently equipped
- nonproficient with firearms
- easily susceptible to bribery or intimidation

And a round of polygraph tests administered from May to November 2000 resulted in 3,500 more agents being fired—although 750 promptly sued and won a stay of their dismissals.

Legislative passage of Fox's reformist measure to supplant the PJF with the AFI was assigned to Carlos Paredes Leyva, but proved to be much more difficult than expected. The actual presidential decree announcing the AFI's forthcoming establishment could not be published in the *Diario oficial* until November 1, 2001, and more delays ensued as the lawsuit brought by the 750 fired PJF agents remained unresolved—and interim AFI Director Genaro García Luna himself came under investigation by the *Procuraduría General de la República* or federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) for irregularities in the purchase of 11 aircraft while he had commanded the Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP).

Another 13 months would elapse as Mexico's Congress sought to integrate the new AFI's legal status within the framework of existing laws, eventually grafting these new policies onto the existing Policía Judicial structure (including the retention of some of its fired agents). A new law establishing the AFI's hybrid *Policía Federal Investigadora* or "Federal Investigative Police" was finally announced on December 27, 2002, and Attorney-General Rafael Macedo de la Concha could announce next month that 3,000 new agents had been hired.

Disappointment and Deactivation (2003–2012)

A little over a year later, official statistics indicated that the AFI was operational with a budget of 2.62 billion pesos in 2004, approximately 33 percent of the total annual budget for the Attorney-General's Office. The Federal Investigative Agency itself was organized in six divisions with three support-sections:

- Planeación Policial or "Law-Enforcement Planning"
- Despliegue Regional Policial or "Regional Law-Enforcement Deployments"
- Investigación Policial or "Law-Enforcement Investigations"
- Análisis Táctico or "Tactical Analysis"
- Operaciones Especiales or "Special Operations"
- INTERPOL México
- Administración y Servicios or "Administrative Services" Section
- Asuntos Jurídicos or "Legal Affairs" Section
- Servicios Técnicos or "Technical Services" Section

Manpower consisted of more than 5,000 police officers, 1,600 *investigadores* or detectives, and 450 other specialists. Uniforms were standard military-style uniforms in black, gray, or navy blue with black boots, adorned with insignia bearing the initials "AFI." However, criminals were often able to duplicate these outfits, or even purchase imitation uniforms for their criminal activities, while many of the old force's problems and weaknesses still persisted: as early as December 2005, it was already being reported in Washington, DC, that 457 AFI agents were facing criminal charges, while another 1,500 were under investigation.

A year later, after the contested installation of Mexico's next administration under President Felipe Calderón (who had won the election by the narrowest of margins), an attempt was made to overhaul and eliminate the AFI's problems by merging its command with the Federal Preventive Police as of December 15, 2006, thereby creating a single Policía Federal force as part of Calderón's reformist *Estrategia Nacional de Combate a la Delincuencia* or "National Strategy to Combat Crime." Again, though, it proved impossible to pass this structural rearrangement through Mexico's cumbersome legislature, so that the AFI reverted to its original status by May 2009.

In the meantime, the cartels' wealth and power continued to soar, and many parts of the country had been plunged into violence as these criminal empires fought to expand their holdings. Demoralized AFI agents stationed in dangerous outposts in remote corners of Mexico, far from any reliable support, grew ever more reluctant to stand up to the bloodthirsty *sicarios*. When Alfredo "El Mochomo" Beltrán Leyva of the powerful Beltrán Leyva clan was arrested by the Army on January 21, 2008, in Culiacán, Sinaloa, the eleven AFI agents assigned to hold him in their detention center overnight to be flown out to Mexico City next morning were only too eager to accept a million-peso bribe to abandon their premises, so that a rescue-party of 200 cartel gunmen might storm the building with the aid of a *blindado* or "armored vehicle" next dawn.

Because of lack of budgetary support for this discredited agency in Congress, AFI manpower was allowed to dwindle from 6,718 agents in 2007 to 5,446 in 2008; 4,699 by 2009; and a mere 4,150 by 2010. Frustrated by this steady depletion in its "human, material, and technological resources," which in turn had led to a "lack of credibility and unmotivated personnel" in the face of the rising tide of crime, Admiral Wilfrido Robledo Madrid—the AFI director since December 2009, who had previously headed the State of Mexico's *Agencia de Seguridad Estatal* or "State Security Agency," the Federal Preventive Police, and the Technical Services division of the *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional* or "Center for Research and National Security" (CISEN)—resigned in disappointment by late April 2011, to resume his naval career. It was finally decreed on April 26, 2012 (the eve of Mexico's next presidential election), that the AFI's remaining 4,195 agents and duties would be merged within 90 days into a new organization to be called the Policía Federal Ministerial (PFM), so that the AFI was officially disbanded on July 26, 2012.

Policía Federal Ministerial (2012–Present)

This reconstituted body was conceived to function similarly to the U.S. Marshals Service, its main duties being:

- ensuring compliance with judicial orders

- protecting witnesses, informants, and victims
- conducting special security tasks
- monitoring the Centro Federal de Arraigo ("Federal Preventive-Detention Center")
- locating foreign fugitives through its Interpol liaison-office

It was to have more powers than the superseded AFI, including increased involvement in investigating and tracking federal crimes, and as an independent body, greater internal oversight—including the hiring and retention of agents, so that Director Vidal Díaz-Leal Ochoa soon announced that he intended to augment its personnel to 7,000. New uniforms were introduced the day before this agency became operational, consisting of a navy-blue shirt, khaki pants and boots, and detailed insignia with each agent's embroidered initials (to prevent counterfeiting of uniforms).

See also: Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Break with El Chapo; Calderón Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesús; CISEN.

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Aguacates, Cártel de los (1980–1989).

"Avocados Cartel," jocular name for the humble marijuana-growing operation formed in Michoacán by the Valencia family, which transitioned into the Milenio, Valencias, and finally the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel.

Foundation and Early Years (1980–1989)

This syndicate was started when 25-year-old Luis Valencia Valencia and his 21-year-old cousin José Armando Valencia Cornelio [born in Uruapan on November 28, 1959]—ambitious young men who had ventured north to establish smuggling contacts in Tamaulipas—returned home around 1980 to develop their own sources of marijuana and low-grade heroin. Their strategy consisted of proposing among their numerous relations in the vast Valencia farming-clan, plus close friends toiling throughout the hilly municipality of Aguililla and beyond, to begin supplementing their meager incomes by harvesting and concealing bundles of narcotics in their commercial bulk-shipments of avocados toward the United States. As volumes grew, the Valencia brothers would also begin offering to buy additional crops from other poor avocado-farmers working farther afield in Michoacán's highlands.

Soon, they traveled in person to begin establishing drug outlets in San Jose,

California, and returned with their first profits in American dollars to buy up more lands around Aguililla and increase output. Their operation flourished over the next few years, to the point where Armando Valencia moved to Redwood during the early 1980s to oversee their budding distribution network in California. By 1985, authorities along both sides of the frontier were aware of the Valencias' activities, identifying them as one of several syndicates acknowledging the authority of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, *padrino* or "godfather" of Mexico's criminal underworld—who in order to ensure the peaceful development of trafficking had declared Michoacán "neutral territory" without any dominant cartel, where all traffickers might enjoy free passage for their shipments.

The family was by then selling their excess marijuana by the ton to existing borderland outfits such as the Tijuana Cartel, to smuggle it into the United States themselves. The Valencias' association with this powerful Baja California gang run by the Arellano Félix family was apparently cemented when young Christian Valencia married a daughter of the violent cartel-boss Ramón Arellano Félix and settled down with his new relations in their border stronghold. Many other Valencia family members had meanwhile relocated to Uruapan, their sheer numbers and similar names creating confusion whenever the authorities attempted to file charges.

Emergence as the Milenio Cartel (1990s)

Despite the modest returns on marijuana and low-grade heroin, the Valencias prospered significantly during the ensuing 1980s, and after the "godfather" Félix Gallardo was arrested in April 1989, they would also begin dealing more through Amado Carrillo Fuentes' Juárez Cartel. However, the Valencias' profits multiplied exponentially after Armando struck a deal with Fabio Ochoa of the Medellín Cartel around 1990 to use his family's well-established smuggling routes and contacts to trans-ship more lucrative cocaine through Mexico and into the United States (often with a large fleet of tuna-boats that they controlled). Proceeds from this rich new stream would in turn allow the Valencias' organization to expand from their native Michoacán into the adjoining Pacific states of Jalisco, Colima, and Nayarit during the early 1990s, and eventually add methamphetamines from the Amezcua Contreras to their narcotics inventory [for greater details about this latter arrangement, see "Colima Cartel"].

Like many other early traffickers, the Valencias seldom resorted to violence, instead preferring to conduct their business unobtrusively through targeted bribes of police and customs officials. State authorities would later attribute only 30 unsolved murders in both Michoacán and Jalisco to dealers, for the entire 1992–2001 period. And the Valencias would simultaneously nurture their legitimate agricultural enterprises (once the U.S. government eased its decades-old restrictions on *aguacate* imports in 1997, fears of any fruit-fly infestations having been allayed), exporting so many avocados over the ensuing years through their front company that they would become known as the *Reyes de los Aguacates* or "Avocado Kings." They further diversified into other fruits, investing in modern processing facilities and canning factories that would become permanent assets to the family fortune—all the while covertly evolving into the much wealthier and more powerful *Cártel del Milenio* or "Millennium Cartel" as the year 2000 approached.

[For subsequent developments in this organization's history, see "Milenio Cartel."]

See also: Colima Cartel; Cuinis, Los; Milenio Cartel.

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AK-47 Assault Rifle

(1947–Present). Despite its decades-old design, still a highly-regarded weapon preferred by many cartel *sicarios* because of its power and ruggedness.

Historical Evolution (1947–1959)

This weapon was first conceived in October 1941 by 21-year-old Soviet tank commander Sergeant Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov while he was recovering in the hospital after being wounded in his left shoulder against Nazi invaders during the Battle of Bryansk outside Moscow, during the Second World War. While being transported rearward to receive medical attention, the young soldier had seen most of his injured companions murdered by German troops armed with machine-guns, so that even before being discharged from the hospital as an invalid, Kalashnikov was already dreaming of designing a Russian equivalent to turn the tide of war in the Red Army's favor.

He had started by tinkering with existing submachine guns, and two years later entered a competition to create a firearm capable of functioning reliably in the muddy and frozen conditions along Soviet battlelines. Kalashnikov's carbine-design lost, yet when the Red Army held another competition for assault rifles in 1946, a revamped gas-operated model of his weapon was selected as one of three finalists. After an initial round of testing, one of his assigned assistants—Aleksandr Zaytsev—suggested a major redesign, to which Kalashnikov reluctantly agreed.

Their improved model was chosen next year as the winning design, proving to be a brilliantly simple yet effective weapon designated the *Automat Kalashnikova obraztsa 1947 goda* or "Kalashnikov's automatic rifle model year 1947," abbreviated into AK-47. After more than 100 additional modifications were incorporated, it was finally adopted as the Soviet Army's new assault-rifle in 1949, but production difficulties and a shroud of secrecy prevented its widespread distribution until 1956—after which a refined version known as the "AK Modernized" or AKM would be introduced three years later and go on to become the standard version mass-produced around the world. This revolutionary weapon's advantages lay in:

- its straightforward design, having only 16 moving parts
- inexpensive manufacture
- ease of operation and maintenance
- a ruggedness that would become truly legendary, thanks to its large gas-piston, ample clearance between moving parts, and tapered cartridge-case

The Soviet government granted licenses to its Warsaw Pact allies, as well as the People's Republic of China, to manufacture copies of the 1959 AKM assault rifle in their own factories, so that over 55 national armies would eventually adopt this model. Tens of thousands were furthermore sold to select noncommunist countries, Mexico being one such recipient.

Introduction into Mexico (1960s–1970s)

Excellent Czech-made versions of the 1959 AKM were first offered through diplomatic channels as prestigious gifts for Mexico's presidents during the early 1960s. The sight of such uniquely modern firearms being wielded by impeccably-tailored undercover bodyguards stirred widespread admiration—so that other high government functionaries soon clamored for access to these prized weapons, along with senior Army officers and wealthy magnates, causing purchases to rise despite the costs and difficulties of acquisition.

The AK-47 had quickly been nicknamed the *cuerno de chivo* or "goat's horn" by its many Mexican devotees because the distinctively shaped 30-round ammunition clip had the same curvature as that animal's horns. Yet for all its status, this weapon had fearsome penetrating-power as well. Shortly thereafter, Kalashnikov introduced an upgraded redesign in 1974, so that new AK-74 models began to be distributed among Soviet armed forces as replacements for older versions in 1978, and production of the 1959 AK-47 rifles largely ceased in Russia. Nevertheless, some 75 million of the original two models had already been produced worldwide, particularly in its AKM configuration, while other nations and manufacturers would continue to issue their own variants for years to come.

Restriction and Criminal Embrace (1972–Present)

Due to a proliferation of firearms in postwar Mexico from a variety of international sources, President Luis Echeverría's administration on December 29, 1971, passed an all-encompassing *Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos* or "Federal Firearms and Explosives Law" (LFAFE), which went into effect upon being promulgated in the *Diario oficial* as of January 11, 1972. This legislative act defined the rights and responsibilities of owning light hunting-rifles, shotguns, and pistols for rural residents, sportsmen, collectors, and private individuals, as well as the .38-caliber sidearms used by security firms. Article 11 lists the few small-caliber firearms that can legally be registered, while any higher-powered weaponry is reserved *para el uso exclusivo* or "for the exclusive use" of the armed forces. [For further details, see "Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos."]

Notwithstanding such limitations, the Kalashnikov's power and distinctive style would attract many private Mexican buyers, even though the Army High Command never purchased or issued any AK-47s among its formations. The only official agency known to carry these weapons was the hated Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" (PJF), whose corrupt field-agents were often very venal and held themselves to be above the law. Tens of thousands of Kalashnikovs would consequently be bought through back-channels or on the black market, honest gun-owners rarely putting their AK-47s on view.

Well-heeled cartels and their *sicarios* felt no such compunctions, of course, especially

in the country's more remote and lawless regions. "They love AK-47s," a Los Angeles police detective would comment about the Sinaloa Cowboys gang in December 2007. Having a large inventory magnified a leader's prestige, and many early instances of their use abound:

- When the drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero expanded his vast marijuana grow-operations into Zacatecas, he began by buying up ranches around Fresnillo in March 1984 and implementing many modern upgrades—including providing 250 AK-47s and citizen-band radios for guards to defend these properties.
- In October 1992, Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán narrowly avoided death when his car was cut off by a Dodge Ram, from which Ramón Arellano Félix and a pair of henchmen—all three armed with AK-47s—alighted to open fire, striking El Chapo's vehicle 12 times before he sped away.
- The Sinaloan boss would retaliate by sending a 50-man assault team armed with AK-47s and AR-15s charging into a Puerto Vallarta discothèque at 2:30 a.m. on November 8, 1992, killing six people in an eight-minute exchange of heavy gunfire that nearly claimed Ramón Arellano.
- In September 2001, 28-year-old Texas-born drug dealer Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez, wishing to project an aura of power, staged a show for two visiting Memphis distributors by surrounding himself with bodyguards toting AK-47s.
- During the summer of 2004, a squad of Zeta gunmen arrived from Matamoros in the town of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, with Gulf Cartel instructions to swing the upcoming election in favor of its chosen candidate. Patrolling the streets in armored pickups, openly brandishing AK-47s, the squad's bribes and threats secured the citizenry's cooperation, who would later bitterly recall this Zeta occupation as *Operación "Cuerno de Chivo"* or Operation "Goat Horn."

Adulation of these assault rifles would eventually lead to some being plated in golf-leaf as gaudy status-symbols for wealthy drug barons, such as:

- Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, who threatened a Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Administration operative during a stand-off in Matamoros in November 1999, while carrying a gold-plated AK-47.
- Devious Chinese-Mexican importer Zhenli Ye Gon, whose opulent mansion was raided and searched by federal agents on March 15, 2007, a gold-plated AK-47 (a gift from a cartel boss) being found among his weaponry.
- Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos González, leader of the Milenio Cartel's breakaway La Resistencia faction, who was arrested by federal police in September 2012 with a gold- and silver-plated AK-47 among his personal arsenal.
- Even the fugitive "El Chapo" Guzman, who had a gold-plated AK-47 with him in his apartment hideaway in Mazatlán, when naval special-forces burst in and arrested him on February 22, 2014.

Black-Market Arms Trade (2000–Present)

Since the U.S. Federal Assault Weapons Ban restricting such military-grade firearms expired in 2004, "straw purchasers" have been buying as many as 20 AK-47s at a time, paying $11,000 cash or more in Southwestern gun-stores. Such sales are legal, but

the purchasers must sign a U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives document saying that they are buying them for personal use—even though many are simply turned over to brokers who smuggle them into Mexico, for sale at three or four times their original price. A Hearst Newspapers survey conducted in May 2011 (drawn from U.S. court documents from 44 cases involving 165 defendants in Texas, Arizona, and three other states) showed that the most popular among 1,600 guns bought and either shipped into Mexico or intercepted en route was the AK-47 imported from Romania by Century International Arms of Delray Beach, Florida. This company circumvented U.S. federal law by converting them once in country into military-style AK-47s capable of holding 30-round magazines.

According to Mexico's Secretaría de Defensa Nacional or "Secretariat of National Defense" (Sedena), slightly more than 147,000 firearms were confiscated from cartels and their minions between January 2005 and February 2015, of which 62 percent were AK-47s. In recent years, one in six such confiscated weapons has been a cheaper, Chinese-made copy of the 1959 AKM-47s, manufactured by the company NORINCO.

See also: AR-15 Rifle; Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle; Gulf Cartel: Arms Importation; *Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos*; Mossberg Shotgun.

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Allende Massacre (2011).

Unchecked slaughter of civilians around the town of Allende and border-city of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, after the Zeta Cartel learned that four local residents had betrayed their top leaders.

Background (2010–2011)

A few months previously in the Dallas suburbs, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency had launched Operation "Too Legit to Quit" after some surprising confiscations, one being $802,000 vacuum-packed and hidden in the gas tank of a pickup being driven by Gilberto Moreno Villanueva (who faced a 20-year sentence as a result of this seizure). After several more arrests, the regional DEA field-agent and assistant U.S. attorney determined that these funds came from 30-year-old José "El Diablo" Vásquez Jr., a Dallas native who had started selling drugs in high school and had become the main Zeta cocaine-distributor in East Texas, moving truckloads of drugs, guns, and money every month.

However, before Vásquez could be arrested, he escaped across the border to Allende, Coahuila [a small ranching-town about 40 miles southwest from Eagle Pass, Texas], so the DEA instead detained his wife and mother to pressure him into returning and collaborating with their investigation. Vásquez reluctantly gave in and also agreed to persuade Héctor "El

Negro" Moreno Villanueva, wealthy brother of the arrested pickup driver—and communications chief for the Zetas in Piedras Negras—to reveal the secret personal identification numbers or PINs for the otherwise untraceable Blackberry phones used by the two top cartel bosses, Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño Morales and his younger brother Omar (Z-42).

As a further complication, a band of armed Zeta *sicarios* disguised in military uniforms manning a lonely roadblock on Highway 57 near the town of Santa María del Río in distant San Luis Potosí mistakenly attacked a passing SUV carrying unarmed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents Jaime Zapata and Victor Ávila on February 15, 2011. Misconstruing its U.S. license-plates as an attempted deception by their Gulf Cartel rivals, these Zetas forced the Americans' vehicle into a ditch and opened fire, killing Zapata and badly wounding Ávila. Infuriated by this attack, Washington compelled Mexico's federal government to launch a nationwide sweep against all Zetas, so that hundreds would be arrested and harassed over the next 12 days.

As part of this angry reaction, DEA officials in Washington opted—despite having promised to keep intelligence regarding the Treviño Moraleses' PINs a tightly-guarded secret—to forward this information to one of their supervisors in Mexico City, who was working in the "Sensitive Investigative Unit" program and therefore shared it with a Mexican Policía Federal operative, one of a small group of handpicked specialists conducting operations under DEA supervision. The American officials thereby hoped to electronically track the movements of both Zeta leaders—but instead, the vicious Treviño Morales siblings quickly learned through their informants that some unnamed subordinates in Allende had betrayed them, and set in motion a brutal revenge.

Even the uninvolved *plaza* underboss at nearby Piedras Negras, ex-Policía Federal de Caminos or "Federal Highway Patrol" officer Mario Alfonso "Poncho" Cuéllar Villanueva, received a menacing phone-call from Miguel Ángel Treviño, ordering him to return the weekly consignment of 596 kilos of cocaine that he was waiting to smuggle across the border for the cartel. Cuéllar later commented:

> *That's something I had seen them do many times before. Every time 40 planned to kill someone in the organization, he would first make sure he had taken back their merchandise.*

Realizing that he now had no future in Mexico, Cuéllar—along with the directly implicated Vásquez and Héctor Moreno, plus another local contractor named José Luis "El Wichin" or "La Güiche" Garza Gaytán—decided to abscond across the border into Texas with the 596 kilos of cocaine, plus $5 million to $8 million in cartel cash.

Massacre (March 18–22, 2011)

Consequently, around 5:30 p.m. on Friday, March 18, 2011, 42 pickups escorted by four municipal police-cars began arriving in Allende [population: 23,000], disgorging some 200 heavily-armed young thugs to begin inflicting the Zetas' punishment. The local police (20 of whom were pocketing $300 a month from the cartel) were instructed not to go out on patrol or answer any emergency calls that weekend, just limit themselves to "pick up anyone with the surname Garza and hand them over to the Zetas." Initially hunting for Luis Garza, Héctor Moreno, or any of their relations and

friends, the *sicarios* rounded up about 150 civilians and by nightfall carried them off to Garza's sprawling ranch—which they had already seized—less than two miles away around the kilometer 7 mark of the two-lane Allende-to-Villa Unión highway.

There, these hapless captives were savagely interrogated, tortured, and executed by drug-intoxicated young Zetas in a bloodlust, their bodies being stacked up in a large cinder-block storage area filled with hay, so as to be doused with fuel and incinerated overnight. The dead included Garza's son, José Luis Garza, Jr.; numerous innocent ranch-hands; and even a 91-year-old grandmother with her granddaughter still in her stroller. Brutish gunmen also ordered the first fire-engines that appeared in response to emergency phone-calls to withdraw, and Fire Chief Evaristo Treviño informed Allende's mayor:

> *We were facing an impossible situation, and the only thing we could do was to stand down, out of fear of the threats we faced. There were too many armed men. We were afraid for our lives. We couldn't fight bullets with water.*

From Allende, the gunmen moved northward through the night, rounding up more people as they covered the 35 miles into Piedras Negras, a factory-city of 152,000 inhabitants on the southern shores of the Rio Grande. Many more people were heartlessly killed there, including dozens slain within the grounds of Piedras Negras' penitentiary, which was under Zeta control. Over the years of Coahuila's occupation, numerous locals had performed tasks for the cartel, and they now learned that even the most transitory association with any of the four "traitors" could lead to a horrific death, for them and their families. A second large batch of victims was driven to another of Garza's ranches and shared this same fate. Uninvolved civilians spent a sleepless night of terror, realizing that there was no one they could call on for help against this arbitrary, sadistic Zeta onslaught: the police, municipal authorities, even the soldiers at the small Army base were all too frightened to intervene.

Next morning—Saturday, March 19, 2011—the gunmen returned to Allende and summoned several heavy-equipment operators, ordering them to begin tearing down dozens of now-empty homes and businesses. But first, the *sicarios* allowed neighbors and poorer residents to take whatever they wanted out of these structures, triggering an orgy of looting before the gutted shells were flattened. More than 40 fine homes and large ranch-houses were sacked, burned, and bulldozed that day, and their owners' names never mentioned again. Many of these properties were in busy, well-to-do neighborhoods, within clear sight and earshot not only of passersby and road-traffic, but also of government offices, police stations, and military outposts. Surviving citizens would be left traumatized, hastening past these smoldering ruins with their eyes averted, afraid to speak of these matters to anyone.

Aftermath (April 2011–Present)

The destruction and disappearances from this terrible *Venganza Zeta* or "Zeta Vengeance" would continue in fits and starts for a few more days, spreading as far as Múzquiz, Sabina, Ciudad Acuña, Morelos, Nava, Zaragoza, and Villa Unión. Many residents of the Cinco Manantiales or "Five Springs" district had prospered by helping the cartel over the years, and they now suffered abductions, murders, and arson without the least resistance from the Army or

federal, state, or municipal police, heavily outnumbered and outgunned by the marauding packs of Zetas. And with well-to-do cartel members still living in their midst, and the police and press completely co-opted, civic authorities refused to even report upon this horrific massacre to the state capital or outside world.

Family relations and friends who came to Allende to inquire after their loved ones met only silence or whispered warnings against asking too many questions. It would not be until February 2014, after the Zetas' defeat and retreat out of this region, that a state team of 250 forensic investigators, federal agents, and soldiers finally arrived to begin gathering evidence regarding Allende's hundreds of vanished residents, in an operation code-named "Búsqueda en Vida." They started their investigation at Garza's abandoned ranch, where thousands of burned bone-fragments were found scattered among its weeds. To date, only 17 people have been tried and convicted of participating in these crimes: eight cartel members and nine municipal policemen.

See also: Zeta Cartel (2010–2014).

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Altamira Prison Brawl—see "Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Civil War"

Altiplano Prison (1988–Present).

Maximum-security penitentiary run by the federal government, whose only escapee to date has been Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel.

Officially known as the *Centro Federal de Readaptación Social Número 1: El Altiplano* or "Federal Social Re-adaptation Center Number 1: The Altiplano"—CEFERESO Número 1, for short—this 724-inmate jail was originally built between 1988 and 1990 at Rancho La Palma in the Santa Juana Centro district of the remote municipality of Almoloya de Juárez, about 15 miles outside Toluca in the mountainous State of Mexico (a horseshoe-shaped jurisdiction that curls around Mexico City). Its first prisoners were received in November 1991, and its three-foot-thick walls and defenses have been reinforced over the years, plus a six-mile "no-fly zone" has been imposed to prevent any approach by helicopters or drones.

Occupancy has gradually expanded to 1,200 inmates, while high-profile detainees have come to include Miguel Ángel "El Padrino" Félix Gallardo, Rafael Caro Quintero, and Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, all founders of the Guadalajara Cartel; Eduardo and Francisco Rafael Arellano Félix, as well as Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano, all former Tijuana Cartel leaders; Osiel Cárdenas Guillén of the Gulf Cartel; Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño Morales and his brother Óscar Omar (Z-42) Treviño Morales, both of the Zetas; Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal and Gerardo "El Indio" Álvarez

Vásquez of the Beltrán Leyva Organization; Servando "La Tuta" Gómez Martínez of the Knights Templar; Jesús "El Rey" Zambada García of the Pacific Cartel; Teodoro "El Teo" García Simental; José Jorge "El J. J." Balderas; Osvaldo "El Compayito" García Montoya; etc. "El Chapo" Guzmán's singular escape is fully described under the separate entry "Tunnels: El Chapo's Grand Escape-Tunnel."

See also: Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Tunnels: El Chapo's Grand Escape-Tunnel.

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Amapola* or *amapolero—see "Heroin"

Amphetamines—see "Methamphetamines"

Apodaca Prison Riot—see "Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Civil War"

AR-15 Rifle (1964–Present).

Second most popular firearm among *sicarios*, a magazine-fed and gas-operated weapon that they commonly refer to as an "R-15," or simply *ere* or "R."

Historical Development (1964–2004)

This lightweight firearm was originally developed by Colt's Manufacturing Company of Hartford, Connecticut, as a semiautomatic modified version of the U.S. Army's M16 rifle issued to soldiers during the Vietnam War. Characterized by its rapid-fire capability for discharging high-velocity, small-caliber .223 Remington rounds with great striking-force, it first went on sale for law enforcement and civilian customers in 1964. Its magazine held 30 rounds, which would be chambered one after another automatically, so that the weapon could be fired as quickly as its trigger could be squeezed. Because of this functionality, early AR-15s and AR-style rifles rarely jammed and were very accurate.

Colt's patents on this weapon expired in 1977, so many other manufacturers soon began producing their own AR-15 versions for commercial sales. The Federal Assault-Weapons Ban restricted the Colt AR-15 and its many derivatives during the years 1994–2004, although this law did not affect models with fewer features, so that simplified versions such as the Bushmaster XM15-E2S "M4 type" or "M4gery" carbine would come into production—although they only required the purchase of a separate "fire variant" so as to become capable of discharging three-round bursts or fully automatic fire. An estimated 8 million to 12 million of these firearms are in circulation today in the United States, more being sold every day.

Sicarios' Second Most-Popular Weapon (1992–Present)

During the early 1990s, large cartels with ample funds and contacts among cross-border arms smugglers, such as Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel, would begin acquiring AR-15s. Eyewitnesses recognized these distinctive weapons in the hands of some of the 50 men—disguised in dark uniforms and bulletproof vests bearing the initials "PJF" for Policía Judicial Federal—whom he sent charging into the Christine discothèque in Puerto Vallarta on November 8, 1992, killing six people during an eight-minute exchange of gunfire in an attempted murder of his bitter foes, Ramón and Francisco Javier Arellano Félix of the Tijuana Cartel. A decade later, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén—whose wealthy Gulf Cartel was headquartered in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and likewise enjoyed easy access to gun-sellers in southern Texas—would outfit his deadly new Zeta paramilitary force with the best military-grade ordnance, including AR-15s. Again, witnesses described how the Zetas "used high-powered AK-47s, AR-15s, and a tear-gas grenade-launcher" to rescue an imprisoned comrade during a brazen incursion into the State Ministerial Police headquarters in Matamoros on June 20, 2001.

Heavily-armed Zeta *comandos* or "squads" would defeat rival gangs, police tactical teams, and even Army detachments with their superior weaponry over the next few years, so that other cartels quickly began acquiring military-grade armaments of their own. Such purchases became easier after the U.S. government's Assault-Weapons Ban was lifted in 2004, when "straw men" began buying large numbers of new or secondhand automatic weapons such as AR-15s in border-states and smuggling these into Mexico. Mere possession of a weapon "prohibited under [Mexico's] Federal Firearms and Explosives Law" furnished legal grounds for immediate arrest: the long-untouchable Oaxaca Cartel leader Pedro Díaz Parada, for example, being intercepted while driving alone toward Tule in his pickup on January 16, 2007, with an AR-15 and .357 Magnum revolver by his side—instantly triggering his detention and an investigation that wound up ending his decades-long criminal career.

Cartel gunmen nonetheless continued to arm themselves with record numbers of AR-15s, being matched by police tactical-teams drawing from their caches of seized firearms and ammunition, in addition to officially-sanctioned purchases. AR-15s became a common sight in Mexico's drug war, a popular *norteño* musical *narco*-group even adopting the name "Banda Arkangel R15." According to Army statistics, almost one-quarter (23 percent) of the 147,000 firearms confiscated from cartels and their minions between January 2005 and February 2015 were AR-15s—mostly Bushmasters.

As recently as July 2018, Edgar Humberto Vega Ávalos, director of the Centro de Ejecución de Sanciones 2 Prison in Nuevo Laredo, was fired upon and killed as he drove his white pickup through the Colonia Enrique Cárdenas González—investigators later finding more than 100 spent AR-15, AK-47, and 9mm shell-casings at this crime scene. And at 8:45 p.m. on December 6, 2018, unknown gunmen fired 30–40 rounds from their AR-15s at a municipal police-car as it drove down Díaz Ordaz Boulevard in Tijuana's Colonia Mérida, wounding one officer.

See also: AK-47 Assault Rifle; Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle; Gulf Cartel: Arms Importation; *Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos*; Mossberg Shotgun; Zeta

(2004–2009) Gulf Cartel Soldiers: Long-Range Hit Teams.

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Arellano-Félix Organization.

Crime family that founded the Tijuana Cartel but lost most of its power as of late 2009 because of its failed war against Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán.

Early History (1980s–1990)

The seven brothers (Francisco Rafael, Alberto Benjamín, Carlos Alberto, Eduardo, Ramón Eduardo, Luis Fernando, and Francisco Javier) and four sisters (Alicia María, Enedina, Norma Isabel, and Leticia) were born and raised in Culiacán, Sinaloa, the brood of a mechanic named Benjamín Francisco Arellano Sánchez—originally from Magdalena de Quino, Sonora—and his wife, Norma Alicia Félix Zazueta from Durango. While the eldest son, Francisco Rafael, would become a successful nightclub-owner in Mazatlán during the 1980s, his siblings Benjamín ("El Mín") and Ramón ("El Món") were instead drawn into a life of crime in the border-city of Tijuana under the patronage of Jesús "El Chuy" Labra Avilés, a trafficker who was married to a sister of the Arellanos's mother.

Benjamín soon rose to a position of prominence under Tijuana crime-boss Javier Caro Payán, a cousin of Rafael Caro Quintero and lieutenant of the larger syndicate controlled out of Guadalajara by the influential *padrino* or "godfather" Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo—also a distant Arellano uncle. It was said that his young criminal nephews first came to Félix Gallardo's attention by profiting from smuggling restricted consumer electronics in from the United States, selling these at considerable markups on the Mexican black market.

Seizure of Power (1989–1990)

When the drug overlord Félix Gallardo was unexpectedly arrested in April 1989, his Guadalajara Cartel broke up into its regional components, Caro Payán being confirmed as titleholder to the coveted Tijuana *plaza*. However, he was briefly detained shortly thereafter in Canada, during which absence his standing was undermined and usurped by Benjamín Arellano, backed by his brothers Francisco Rafael, Ramón, Francisco Javier, and their uncle by marriage Labra Avilés. When Caro Payán attempted to reassert his authority, he was repulsed and later assassinated in Guadalajara. The Arellanos immediately set about founding their own independent cartel through a series of brutal assassinations. [During this violent outburst, they also unwittingly created a lifelong enmity when a drunken trafficker named Armando "El Rayo de Sinaloa" López Esparza, a close friend and emissary from Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán—the new titleholder to Tecate, Baja California—arrived uninvited at Tijuana's Club Britania to crash the baptismal festivities of Benjamin's daughter during the summer of 1989. Ramón angrily emerged and shot López in the head, then had his body dumped on a lonely road; Guzmán, who regarded the deceased as "almost a brother," never forgave this murder.]

By December 1989, the Arellanos (soon nicknamed the *aretes*) ordered their gunmen to begin decimating the Machi Ramírez, a once-prominent crime family that had controlled Tijuana's drug-trade prior to their arrival. While completing their takeover, the usurpers quickly organized their cartel, using family members to compartmentalize and insulate its criminal activities from the authorities. The cunning Benjamín Arellano remained as overall boss—his eldest brother, Francisco Rafael, being widely derided as *El Menso* or "The Dummy"—while the sadistic Ramón became head of its security forces, recruiting street-thugs and rich young sociopaths to serve as *sicarios*, torturers, and assassins.

Ramón soon hired foreign mercenaries to train and arm paramilitary squads, to enforce the family's wide-reaching *derecho de piso* or "transit fee" claims, extending for 100 miles from their assigned Tijuana *plaza* as far as Mexicali. Any groups that wished to export cargoes across Baja California's northern border into the United States, had to pay or risk being violently punished as "trespassers." Francisco Rafael coordinated the buying and selling of the Arellanos' own narcotics, while Carlos Alberto supervised their shipments into California except for the all-important Colombian cocaine trans-shipments, which were managed by Eduardo (who also became a medical doctor). The youngest, Luis Fernando, would manage the family's legitimate businesses, where illicit proceeds could be laundered and disappear beyond official scrutiny.

First Challenges (1991–1992)

The Arellanos' unilateral seizure and heavy-handed monopolization of Baja California's crossing-points was naturally resented by other organizations. The rebuffed "El Chapo" Guzmán, prospering ever more notably in his partnership with Héctor Luis "El Güero" Palma Salazar along the distant Arizona border, united his lesser fellow-Sinaloan bosses into a cooperative Federación in 1990, which would contest the *tijuanenses*' claims and evolve into a rival "Sinaloa Cartel." Tensions and clashes between both trafficking syndicates gradually multiplied, until—in an effort to avert a disruptive all-out war—Benjamín Arellano was summoned to Culiacán during the summer of 1991 for a meeting with Guzmán, monitored by the murderous chief of the Federal Judicial Police, General Guillermo González Calderoni (the man designated by the incarcerated godfather Félix Gallardo to orchestrate the allotment of *plazas*, so that the Arellanos felt constrained to attend).

At this meeting, it was agreed that both sides would refrain from doing "anything that creates bad feeling or mistrust," and that the Sinaloans would not be hampered in smuggling shipments across certain stretches of Baja California's border. However, only a few weeks later, El Chapo persuaded González Calderoni—to whom he was steadily paying generous bribes—to appoint the Sinaloan's choice as Federal Judicial Police *comandante* in Tijuana, so that some 30 Arellano operatives would come to be arrested over the next few months. Their cartel furthermore suffered an expensive string of cocaine and marijuana interceptions in the United States, and they suspected Guzmán of having tipped off the American authorities [a tactic that El Chapo would often employ throughout his career].

Clandestine Warfare and Fatal Blunder (1992–1993)

The Arellanos consequently convened a second meeting in Culiacán for early 1992,

in hopes of assassinating Guzmán, although no opportunity presented itself. Their simmering feud subsequently worsened as the impetuous, six-foot-two-inch, 220-pound Ramón Arellano took a more active role, characterized by numerous killings and counter-killings, plus raids and counter-raids against each other's drug shipments, stash houses, outlets, etc. This underground warfare took on an even more personal turn after two car-bombs detonated outside one of Guzmán's properties in Culiacán on May 29, 1992; then that same October, a murder-attempt narrowly failed to kill him one afternoon while he was trying to exit from Guadalajara's Periférico onto Mariano Otero Avenue—a Dodge Ram cutting him off and three men (one recognizable as Ramón Arellano) alighting to open fire with AK-47s. El Chapo raced past, although his Oldsmobile Cutlass was struck 12 times before escaping.

Guzmán retaliated next month, after learning that Ramón and Francisco Javier "El Tigrillo" Arellano had spent three days straight disporting in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, under the protection of Federal *comandante* Adolfo Mondragón Aguirre. A Sinaloan hit-team attacked while the brothers were partying in the Krystal Hotel's Christine discothèque at 2:30 a.m. on November 8, 1992, a large DINA truck and three SUVs halting outside to disgorge some 50 men armed with AK-47s and AR-15s, wearing dark uniforms and bulletproof vests with the initials "PJF" for Policía Judicial Federal. They double-timed inside and killed six people during an eight-minute exchange of gunfire, which panicked the 300 or so patrons and left more than 1,000 spent cartridges, the Arellanos surviving by bolting into the discotheque's bathroom and crawling out through its air-conditioning duct.

Ramón Arellano vengefully sent out retaliatory hit-teams over the next few months, until he learned in mid-May 1993 that Guzmán would be visiting Guadalajara. Flying surreptitiously into that city on the evening of May 18, 1993, along with a dozen *sicarios* (six or seven being Mexican-American members of the Logan Calle 30 street-gang, recruited from San Diego's Barrio Logan neighborhood and whose U.S. passports would facilitate their escape back across the border once this job was done), Ramón Arellano emerged daily with his assassins from a safe house at 1039 La Merced Street in Colonia Chapalita over the next five days, vainly scouring known haunts for any sign of their quarry, whom they learned was being chauffeured in a late-model white Ford Grand Marquis.

Failing to sight Guzmán by the Monday morning of May 24, 1993, Ramón Arellano gave his gunmen $2,000 apiece as "consolation pay" for this disappointing outcome—instead of the $20,000 each would have received for a successful hit—and informed them that they would all be flying back to Tijuana together that same afternoon. But upon inching through traffic toward Guadalajara's Libertador Miguel Hidalgo International Airport in three vehicles shortly after 3:30 p.m., one carful of *sicarios* spotted El Chapo in a chauffeur-driven, green armored Buick, escorted by a half-dozen bodyguards while going to catch an Aeroméxico flight to Puerto Vallarta. By the time that these first surprised Tijuana gunmen alerted their colleagues and broke out their weaponry to pursue, it was a second car of assassins that actually regained contact—closing in upon the wrong vehicle, the chauffeur-driven white Ford Grand Marquis of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, the bishop of Guadalajara, who had come to the airport to greet

the papal *nuncio*, Monsignor Girolamo Prigione.

Four overeager Arellano gunmen ran up behind this 66-year-old prelate's car on either side and fired off 140 rounds at close range, 14 of which struck and killed him instantly, along with his chauffeur and five innocent bystanders. These murderers then melted into the panicky throngs, leaving behind assorted assault-rifles, pistols, fragmentation grenades, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition in their abandoned vehicle while Arellano and his remaining *sicarios* boarded their own departing Aeroméxico flight for Tijuana as scheduled, flying home undetected.

Repercussions (June 1993–1997)

Next day, an infuriated Mexican government broadcast a nationwide reward of 15 million new pesos—about $5 million—for information leading to the arrest of the main protagonists behind this ugly affair: Ramón, Francisco Javier, and Benjamín Arellano of the Tijuana Cartel, and Héctor "El Güero" Palma and El Chapo from the Sinaloa Cartel. A massive manhunt began, with military and police units aggressively seeking the perpetrators, disrupting Tijuana Cartel operations. El Chapo was soon captured, while warrant #125/93 was formally issued in Mexico City for the guilty Ramón Eduardo Arellano Félix on June 16, 1993, on drug and arms violations, although he successfully remained hidden. Only Francisco Rafael was apprehended by the Federal Judicial Police, in Tijuana on December 4, 1993, and sentenced to a lengthy term in the maximum-security Altiplano prison for illegal-arms possession, drug charges, and complicity in Cardinal Posadas' murder.

It was rumored that the Arellano family eventually paid tens of millions of dollars in bribes to government officials at the highest levels, so that the manhunt for Ramón Arellano gradually eased—although he was placed on the FBI's most-wanted list as of September 1997, separately accused of shipping huge quantities of cocaine, marijuana, and amphetamines into the United States. [A lengthy U.S. indictment against him and his older brother Benjamin would also be unsealed in May 2000, accusing both of numerous more trafficking-offenses.]

Brutal Reign (1994–2000)

An unrepentant Ramón Arellano eventually resumed his cartel activities, with renewed vigor and ever greater cruelty. The Tijuana Cartel's domination over Baja California's drug-trade was viciously enforced, one of his bloodiest examples being inflicted on El Sauzal, a fishing-village home to a minor trafficker named Fermín Castro, who paid his cartel dues in full and on time, until the Arellanos decided that he was becoming too competitive. Ramón Arellano's *sicarios* arrived in the middle of the night on September 17, 1998, lining every man, woman, and child that they could find against a wall and shooting them dead. A 15-year-old girl and 12-year-old boy were El Sauzal's sole survivors. Don Thornhill, a veteran DEA officer who worked both sides of the border during this period, later commented:

> *In my 17 years in this job, I've never seen a more violent group. They would kill people who didn't cooperate. They would kill people who didn't pay a fee or a toll. They would kill people who were not necessarily disloyal to them. They killed* [just] *to set an example.*

Now addicted to cocaine, Ramón Arellano began having his rich young sociopaths (dubbed "*narco* juniors") join him in sadistic killing-sprees—not just murdering but also

inflicting horrific tortures and mutilations. In April 2000, a prosecutor named José Patiño Moreno vanished off a Tijuana street, along with two aides: the special prosecutor Óscar Pompa Plaza and Army Captain Rafael Torres Bernal. When their corpses were later found near Patiño's wrecked car, they were unrecognizable, almost every bone in their bodies having been broken. "They were like sacks of ice cubes," a shocked policeman reported, even their heads having been crushed in an industrial press. Frightened local authorities insisted that these three officials had died in "a lamentable traffic incident," and it came as no surprise that when the AFO's power finally began to wane, two Federal Police commanders were charged with complicity in these sadistic killings.

Difficulties and Renewed War against El Chapo (2000–2001)

But by 2000, their Colombian suppliers were also having issues with the Arellano brothers, who despite their fearsome reputation were struggling to pay their cocaine-debts promptly, so that the South Americans began redistributing loads among other more reliable traffickers (including the Beltrán Leyva brothers, affiliated with the rival Juárez Cartel and imprisoned "El Chapo" Guzmán). Then on December 22, 2000, Mexico's newly-installed PAN President Vicente Fox announced his first major national-security action: a plan to recruit 12,000–15,000 new Federal Police officers and dispatch them into Tijuana to contain the powerful Arellano cartel—although only 2,000 would actually be deployed into the city, most remaining for only a week or two, so that after two calm weeks at the beginning of January 2001, Tijuana reverted to its former lawlessness.

The authorities nevertheless dealt a major blow to Arellano operations when Federal Police agents arrested Rigoberto "El Primo" Yáñez Guerrero and Bernardo "El Jabalí" Araujo Hernández in the Benito Juárez district of Mexico City on March 23, 2001, who were two key operatives: Yáñez in charge of receiving cocaine shipments from Colombia at the Mexico City International Airport, while Araujo ensured that the corresponding payments reached Colombia, as well as providing security for bosses visiting Tijuana. Then in June 2001, the Army arrested Ivonne "La Pantera" Soto Vega, a woman with a close personal relationship with the Arellano brothers and their wives, even vacationing together. Her role in their organization was *blanqueo de dinero* [literally "whitening of money," i.e., money laundering], the U.S. Department of the Treasury estimating that Soto Vega had handled over $120 million during the three years of their investigation.

Then in a series of high-level summit meetings held at Cuernavaca and in Mexico City as of October 2001, the clever and charismatic El Chapo (having recently escaped from prison), succeeded in persuading 25 fellow bosses to join his proposed new Federación of cartels, intended to make everyone's operations function more smoothly and profitably through a reduction of infighting. Each syndicate agreed to temporarily ease its monopoly over its own smuggling-routes, and instead make these available to other members for a modest fee. Such a strategy would not only ease the constant skirmishes which attracted unwanted attention from the authorities, it would furthermore free up better trafficking opportunities for all by leaving U.S. border-agents guessing as to which point-of-entry was going to receive the most traffic. If the Customs and Border Protection Agency should mass men and resources at one particular point, the smugglers could

quickly divert their shipments along this new array of alternate routes, so as to flood across at a less well-defended sector.

The Gulf Cartel of Tamaulipas refused to join Guzmán's Federación, although it did agree to allow members to use their own established routes from Monterrey to Nuevo Laredo, in return for moderate payments. Only the Tijuana Cartel of the Arellano brothers—bitterly antagonistic toward El Chapo—rebuffed the proposal, a decision that would leave them alone and outnumbered against multiple enemies. Guzmán's Federation quickly attacked, and "El Chapo" also began sending a stream of damaging tips into the newly-created Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) in Mexico City, revealing details about the Tijuana Cartel's drug consignments, stash houses, weapons caches, money transfers, etc., which greatly debilitated their organization. The AFI was delighted to receive such actionable intelligence, leading to many seizures and extraditions, and in turn pleasing American antinarcotics agencies such as the DEA.

Leadership Losses and Deterioration (2002–2006)

Beset on all sides and with its income slowly being strangled, the Arellano syndicate was facing defeat by early next year. According to legend, a drunken tourist from Sinaloa was then arrested in Guadalajara by federal agents in late January 2002, bragging to his captors about his cartel "friends" at home, and even mentioning an upcoming party that was being organized for Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada during Mazatlán's Mardi Gras festival. The drunkard was freed and the agents immediately phoned their contacts in Tijuana, informing them about El Mayo's forthcoming movements. Impulsively, the 37-year-old Ramón Arellano drove a white Volkswagen full of his vicious *narco* juniors on a "business" trip down to Mazatlán that next month, bent upon killing his hated foe.

But upon arriving in that unfamiliar city on February 10, 2002, Arellano mistakenly drove his vehicle the wrong way up a one-way street and straight into a Sinaloa State Police patrol, who ordered him to pull over. Upon being approached by Officer Antonio Arias, Ramón Arellano at first presented a fake AFI identity-card, before drawing his gun and fatally shooting Arias twice in the chest. While falling to the ground, the officer fired back a single headshot that killed Arellano, and his fellow troopers killed the drug-boss's murderous companion Efraín Quintero. As the surviving policemen did not know whom they had intercepted—one of the FBI's ten most-wanted fugitives and the most prolific mass-murderer in Mexico—his body was conveyed to the Calderón Mortuary for interment. Next morning, his remains were claimed from this funeral home by some alarming "relatives," who left its undertaker quaking with fear.

Next month, Tijuana Cartel leader Benjamín Arellano was also located by the authorities, living quietly under a pseudonym with his family in a three-bedroom house on a suburban cul-de-sac in the city of Puebla, where he was arrested by Army GAFEs without a shot being fired at 1:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 9, 2002 (three days short of his 50th birthday). His captors reported that the fugitive drug-lord kept a few bags packed along with a wallet stuffed with $100 bills, ready to flee at a moment's notice. The special-forces troops further came across a shrine inside the residence, dedicated to the memory of his brother Ramón. Pres. Vicente Fox declared these two blows against the Arellano Félix

Organization "a great triumph for justice," while most surviving family members fled into hiding. [Although when the federal prosecutor for Baja California, Arturo Güevara Valenzuela, was asked if these actions had significantly impacted trafficking, he responded: "Let me answer that question with a question: will the capture in any way affect demand for drugs in the United States? Doubtful."]

Less than three weeks later, on March 25, 2002, two of the cartel-bosses' aunts and four young nieces and nephews were wounded by unknown gunmen in Tijuana's airport, while waiting to fly out to the United States. Its best leader imprisoned and most intimidating enforcer dead, remaining Arellano underbosses were forced to constrict their operations so that the organization might continue functioning on a reduced scale, suffering others to grow at their expense. By 2005, the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) reported that the *Cártel Arellano Félix* or "Arellano Félix Cartel" (CAF)—known to American authorities as the Arellano-Félix Organization or "AFO"—had had its sphere-of-influence reduced to only four states, compared with 17 for the Sinaloa Cartel and 21 for the Gulf Cartel and its fearsome Zeta enforcers.

The *tijuanenses*' fortunes sank even lower when the youngest brother, Javier "El Tigrillo" Arellano Félix, was apprehended by the U.S. Coast Guard while deep-sea fishing aboard the American-registered boat *Dock Holiday* on August 16, 2006, about 15 miles off the southern tip of Baja California Sur (and thus beyond the 12-mile international limit). His removal brought about a restructuring of the entire cartel, sparking a contest to control its many other businesses besides drug smuggling and *derecho de piso* fees: ancillary yet highly profitable criminal ventures such as prostitution; human trafficking; kidnappings; dealing in stolen cars; high-end robberies; gambling, slot-machine, and betting operations; and even the pirating of DVDs and CDs.

Schism and Blood Feud (2007–2010)

The debilitated Tijuana Cartel would finally be rent asunder after the founding brothers' 29-year-old nephew, Luis Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano, assumed command over its day-to-day operations as of September 2006, despite his inexperience (the only alternatives being his brainy 49-year-old uncle, Eduardo "El Doctor" Arellano Félix, or 44-year-old mother, Enedina Arellano Félix, who were not wartime leaders). El Ingeniero soon found his conferred authority flouted by the organization's hard-bitten security chief, Eduardo Teodoro "El Teo" or "Tres Letras" García Simental, who after more than a year of mounting defiance, was still sending in his contingent's regular cartel-quotas—yet otherwise refusing to even take young Sánchez Arellano's phone-calls.

Wishing to rein in the kidnappings and extortions being perpetrated on Tijuana's middle class as moneymaking ventures by El Teo's *sicarios*, Luis Fernando demanded a face-to-face meeting to call his unresponsive security-chief to account, after one particularly egregious "unauthorized" *levantón* or "abduction" in late April 2008. Police stations throughout Tijuana were phoned on the Friday evening of April 25, 2008, being warned to stay off the streets overnight "because it's going to get ugly." Gunmen for both factions were ordered by radio to assemble, most having already started their weekend diversions. A confrontation was set for Saturday dawn at El Guaycura in

downtown Tijuana, 22 armored vehicles rolling up at the appointed hour, packed with more than 50 heavily-armed men (including ten municipal and five state police officers) all wearing bulletproof vests, many still high on drugs or liquor. The authorities had vanished—not just municipal forces, but federal and state police patrols as well.

El Ingeniero sent his lieutenant El 7-7 across to the rebel convoy, and he twice barked a command for the offending kidnappers to be surrendered for punishment, before informing Sánchez Arellano that El Teo had not even shown up, only second-rank people who insolently said that they had been told to take a message. "Get rid of them," El Ingeniero angrily retorted, so that El 7-7 shot Alfredo "La Máquina" Delgadillo Solís in the face and a fierce gun-battle exploded, during which more than 1,500 rounds were expended and 15 left dead (among them El 7-7), plus 22 wounded. The resultant war would lead to more than 1,000 fatalities over the next two years, and further weaken the divided organization.

Lacking a steady source of income, García Simental's breakaway faction escalated its savage victimization of innocent civilians, ransoms allowing them to finance their struggle against the main Arellano-Félix Organization. It was said that García Simental and his thugs (known as "Los Teos") were directly responsible for more than 300 killings—including those of 42 police officers—and his brutish *sicarios* gained horrific notoriety for their depraved treatment of hapless victims, killing many through burning or asphyxiation or mutilations, before callously dissolving or tossing their bodies away in vacant lots, or hanging them from freeway overpasses. Many citizens fled Tijuana during this reign-of-terror, because of the sadistic cruelties being inflicted by García Simental and his henchmen.

Meanwhile, Eduardo "El Doctor" Arellano Félix—the last of the organization's original seven brothers—was arrested by GAFEs from the Fifth Special Forces Battalion in a house in Tijuana's middle-class Fraccionamiento Lomas del Pedregal around 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 25, 2008, offering only token resistance before surrendering along with his 11-year-old daughter, Alicia, and one lone *sicario*. His desperate nephew El Ingeniero, meanwhile, allied himself with the Zetas, so as to combat García Simental's splinter group—which in turn had already sought an accommodation with the Sinaloa Cartel and was receiving reinforcements under an operational field-commander named José "El Tigre" Soto (who also began sending large Sinaloan drug-loads through the now-undefended Arellano crossing-points into California). Sensing the *tijuanenses*' vulnerability, even the distant Familia Michoacana began making long-range incursions into their shrinking territory, hoping to secure its own direct access into the United States.

Public opinion and government resolve finally began to turn against the vicious García Simental, in particular following the arrest in Ensenada of "body-disposal" specialist Santiago "El Pozolero" Meza López on January 22, 2009. Even for a society benumbed by decades of cartel barbarities, the heartless discarding of innocent victims' remains by butchering and dissolving them in barrels of lye caused a wave of revulsion throughout Mexico. The hunt for García Simental was therefore redoubled and a $2 million reward was offered by federal authorities for information leading to his arrest. Infiltration of local law-enforcement also began to be challenged: 18 Tijuana

Municipal Police officers—among them, its head of intelligence—were arrested at the end of March 2009, while another 39 would be detained over the course of that same year. Each had been receiving $500–800 per month to collaborate with the gangs, money that was delivered at their stations and disbursed by a high-ranking commander.

Mexico City ordered 300 *marino* and Federal Police reinforcements into Tijuana on October 3, 2009, and it was rumored that a secret pact had been struck with the Arellanos to jointly eliminate García Simental's more vicious breakaway-faction. Both contending groups were so worn down by year's end that a former Tijuana Cartel cell headed by Alfonso "El Aquiles" Arzate García and his younger brother René "La Rana" (after being threatened by both feuding sides) was able to move uncontested into the subsidiary border-*plaza* of Mexicali, while García Simental was driven out of Tijuana altogether and arrested without resistance at his La Paz home on January 2, 2010. Two weeks later, an additional 1,000 soldiers and *marinos* were sent into Tijuana, at the request of state Governor José Guadalupe Osuna Millán, while the battered Arellano-Félix Organization slowly tried to patch up its differences and reunify its ranks under El Ingeniero.

On the Defensive (2010–Present)

Starting in February 2010, "El Aquiles" Arzate and his gang—supported by the Sinaloans Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and "El Chapo" Guzmán—began pressing out of their Mexicali foothold to challenge the Arellano remnants clinging to their Tijuana *plaza* and remunerative cross-border smuggling operation at Otay Mesa. By attacking loyal outlying AFO dealers, while offering to supply others with an alternate drug-source so as to become independent, many switched allegiances and were defended by his *sicarios* (known as "Los Aquiles"), then later by Sinaloan squads under such commanders as Gustavo "El Sergio" Inzunza and Cenobio "El Checo" Flores Pacho. The Sinaloa Cartel also persuaded at least seven coastal cells farther south in Baja California to stop paying quotas to "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano, and it was learned that La Familia Michoacana's José de Jesús "El Chango" Méndez Vargas had even set up a rival base-of-operations in the tiny border-town of La Rumorosa, between Mexicali and Tecate.

The Sinaloans' growing presence was confirmed when six members were arrested in Mexicali's Colonias Carranza and Naranjos on April 16, 2010 with 125.8 kilos of cocaine, 17.6 kilos of methamphetamines, assault rifles, and 25 vehicles; two weeks later, five more would be apprehended in a tire garage with almost a ton of marijuana, as well as a grenade launcher, tripod-mounted M2E2 .50-caliber Browning heavy machine-gun, various submachine guns, etc. The Arellanos were not strong enough to push these enemies out of Mexicali, instead resorting to such desperate expedients as dumping the head of a supposed "informant of El Aquiles's" outside daily newspaper *Frontera*'s offices on October 12, 2010, or leaving a body dangling beneath the Fraccionamiento El Mirador Bridge in Playas de Tijuana. One week later, another dead victim was flung from a car with a narco-message taunting Arzate by saying that he "was wearing balls borrowed from El Mayo," signed "Ramón Arellano from Hell." Interlopers nonetheless continued to penetrate Baja California, its Policía Estatal Preventiva or "State Preventive Police" (PEP) arresting 304 criminals from Jalisco, Michoacán, or Sonora during next year alone.

Tijuana had enjoyed an interlude of relative peace while this fighting shifted elsewhere, although U.S. authorities speculated that its former police-chief, Julián Leyzaola, may have also arranged a truce with the hard-pressed Sánchez Arellano. By January 2011, Baja California's Public Safety director would estimate that 35 percent of the state was controlled by the Sinaloans, five percent by La Familia Michoacana, and the remaining 60 percent by the Arellano-Félix organization—statistics which would change to 60 percent Sinaloan control by October 2012, while the *michoacanos* had faded after "El Chango" Méndez was apprehended in Aguascalientes in June 2011. The Sinaloa Cartel now held primary control over most trafficking routes, leaving the Arellanos confined to their border-city stronghold and Otay Mesa.

In December 2012, the incarcerated Eduardo Arellano Félix was extradited to the United States, where he would be sentenced to 15 years in prison in August 2013; the eldest brother, Francisco Rafael, was assassinated on October 18, 2013—six days short of his 64th birthday—even though he had never been considered a major player. And his young nephew Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano was finally arrested by soldiers and PGR agents at 4:00 p.m. on June 23, 2014, while watching a soccer match in a Carl's Jr. restaurant, leaving only his mother, Enedina, in charge of their shrunken cartel.

Nevertheless, a report from early 2015 indicated that the *tijuanenses* were still attempting to retake some territory from the Sinaloans and expanding their presence abroad. Following El Chapo's final arrest in 2016, evidence emerged that the Tijuana Cartel remnants had formed an alliance with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, to challenge the Sinaloans' hegemony in Baja California—and despite the capture of several top members, still retained significant control over their border stronghold and its immediate area.

See also: Cardinal Posadas Murder; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Tunnels.

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Armored Vehicles—see "Narcotanques"

Artistas Asesinos (2002–Present). "Killer Artists," a Ciudad Juárez street-gang that served as Sinaloa Cartel auxiliaries during the attempted takeover of that border city.

The unusual name derived from early members' interest in urban graffiti. Many blocks or neighborhood *barrios* throughout this city of 1.4 million people harbored packs of disaffected youths, each jealously guarding their "turf," their one common interest being esteem for gifted street-artists who could

adorn walls with distinctive and meaningful graffiti. The first mention of the term "Artistas Asesinos" occurred in May 2002, when diverse bands of such alienated latchkey kids and penniless runaways began to follow the art of Jorge Ernesto "El Dream" Sáenz, a talented but troubled teenager who was incarcerated for murdering a municipal policeman. While imprisoned, he met another exceptional young artist and kindred spirit—Éder Ángel "El Saik" Martínez Reyna—and together they gained a great following among Juárez's rootless youth.

Soon, the Artistas Asesinos were being referred to in the streets as the Doble A, sometimes written "AA," or Doblados. This fluid talent-pool of delinquents would provide Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's Gente Nueva paramilitary force with an inexhaustible supply of expendable lookouts, couriers, guards, enforcers, and even contract-killers as of late December 2007 who could move familiarly throughout the streets, approaching victims without arousing suspicion, and their youth minimizing any sentences that they might receive.

See also: Juárez Cartel: War for Ciudad Juárez.

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Avocados Cartel—see "Aguacates, Cártel de los"

B

All you have to do, is not look.

—José Luis Holguín, chief of police for Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (1995)

Badiraguato. Small city of roughly 3,750 residents in the northwestern state of Sinaloa, whose municipality of 15 *sindicaturas* or "conservatorships" sprawls over 2,265 square miles, up through the arid foothills into the towering heights of the Sierra Madre Occidental.

Because of its inaccessibility due to winding, primitive dirt-roads and its scant population of less than 30,000 overall residents, this municipality has long been ignored by the authorities, providing an unsupervised haven for such illicit activities as cultivating pockets of drug crops—whose yields can then be exported by truck 40 miles south into the larger city of Culiacán, a longtime smuggling-hub, or flown directly out of the mountains toward the U.S. border from makeshift airfields. When the American demand for recreational drugs surged during the 1960s and '70s, Badiraguato's traffickers would be among the first to use their rural family connections to arrange concealed growths of narcotics high up in this region, moving the resultant harvests out through Culiacán. For such reasons, a surprising number of Mexico's early drug-lords would all be born and raised in this one impoverished district, such as Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, the Beltrán Leyva brothers, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, Rafael Caro Quintero, Ignacio Coronel Villarreal, etc.

See also: Beltrán-Leyva Organization; Caro Quintero, Rafael; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo": Creation of the "Sinaloa Cartel."

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"Barbie"—see "Valdez Villarreal, Édgar 'La Barbie'"

Barcina, Operación—see "Tepic Strafing"

Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle (1982–Present). Very powerful firearm developed for military use, intended to cripple vehicles and penetrate armor or walls from great distances, which have been acquired by both drug cartels and Mexico's armed forces.

Development (1982–2001)

These very large semiautomatic, recoil-operated rifles were originally designed by Ronnie G. Barrett, who set up his Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Company in Christiana, Tennessee—about ten miles south of Murfreesboro—to build and market these weapons after his first working-model was completed in 1982 [hence this initial rifle's designation as the "M82" for "Model 1982"]. Interest at first proved limited, but an improved M82A1 version was created by 1986, so that the U.S. Marine Corps finally purchased about 125 of this weapon during 1990–1991, after which special orders began slowly coming in from the U.S. Army and Air Force.

The Barrett M82 was intended primarily as an "anti-materiel" weapon, fired from 1,000–1,200 yards to cripple sensitive enemy equipment—parked aircraft, radar units, lightly-armored vehicles, trucks, pillboxes, fuel silos, and other valuable assets—targets that would have normally required rocket launchers, recoilless rifles, antitank missiles, mortars, or even artillery to destroy. The rifle can also be employed for remote detonation of explosive ordnance. As a long-range sniper rifle, the M82 could even kill enemy soldiers sheltering behind walls, as its powerful rounds can penetrate bricks and concrete, as well as neutralize enemy snipers at "standoff" range—meaning such a great distance that its gunman can safely shoot from beyond any possible counter-fire range from ordinary sniper rifles. By the summer of 2002, an upgrade of the M82A1 version finally emerged from its U.S. Army trial-phase and was approved for purchase, being officially designated as the "Long Range Sniper Rifle, Caliber .50, M107."

Acquisitions in Mexico (2005–Present)

Less than three years later, the first Barrett rifles began to appear in Mexico, acquired by the Gulf Cartel—notorious for smuggling in illegal firearms from Texas—to be employed by its Zeta paramilitary force in defending Nuevo Laredo against rival attacks during the winter of 2004–2005. Largely comprised of military deserters, the original Zetas had sufficient trained marksmen to effectively use such weapons, which are otherwise unwieldy and difficult to aim accurately by unqualified gunmen. Their spectacular power nonetheless proved so impressive that many syndicates simply acquired them as menacing "prestige" weapons; a *norteño* musical group even adopted the name "Calibre 50" by way of tribute.

Only two Barrett rifles were confiscated by the Mexican authorities in 2007, quickly rising to 13 by 2010, for a total of at least 42 seized from cartel gunmen between 2007 and 2011, virtually all in such violent hotbeds as Ciudad Juárez, Culiacán, Tijuana, Reynosa, Apatzingán, Veracruz, and Nogales. One such .50-caliber rifle was fired by *sicarios* holding a fortified stash-house in southern Chihuahua on March 8, 2008, striking an Army armored fighting-vehicle and a police patrol-car during a bloody shootout that left one soldier and six traffickers dead. Seven M107 rifles had been found during an Army raid on a Gulf Cartel arsenal in Reynosa on November 7, 2008; another Barrett was present during the ambush of a federal convoy departing Tepic's airport on Saturday, April 18, 2009, in which seven policemen died while transferring Beltrán Leyva comptroller Gerónimo Gámez into the nearby El Rincón Penitentiary. The American government's ill-conceived Operation "Fast and Furious" shipped 34 Barretts into Mexico, of which only four were ever recovered—one following a vicious clash between cartel armored-vehicle columns near Saric and Tubutama,

Sonora, which left 20 *sicarios* dead and ten captured before dawn on July 1, 2010. Another 20 Barretts had meanwhile been intercepted by the U.S. Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agency along the Southwest Border during 2009–2010.

A Policía Federal helicopter was obliged to make a forced-landing after being struck by .50-caliber rounds fired from the ground by a Familia Michoacana rifleman on May 24, 2011; five days later, four helicopters were hit as they disembarked a contingent of troops, who fanned out and captured 11 *sicarios* and 70 "long arms"—a Barrett among them. Convinced of the potential threat, the Army's High Command ordered all captured Barretts gathered for training its special forces, and also began looking into the purchase of advanced sniper-detection equipment [officially known as "acoustic gunfire-detectors," or more informally as "shot spotters"]. One such version, the French 01dB-Metravib "Gunfire Detection and Localization System" manufactured by ACOEM Group, was originally designed as a countermeasure against sniper attacks on United Nations peacekeepers in Sarajevo and Bosnia, and was demonstrated at a military base in the State of Mexico in May 2012. The expectation was to deploy such sniper-detecting gear in conjunction with special-forces counter-sniper teams armed with their own .50-caliber rifles, in support of frontline units.

Sporadic attacks with Barretts nonetheless persisted: around 2:00 a.m. on February 19, 2013, *comandante* Gustavo Gerardo "El Jerry" Garza Saucedo of Nuevo León's Agencia Estatal de Investigaciones or "State Investigative Agency" (AEI) was murdered by a single sniper-round in the back while returning into his home at the intersection of Hacienda Santa Clara and Hacienda del Rosario Streets in the exclusive Fraccionamiento Hacienda del Carmen neighborhood of Apodaca, a northeastern suburb of Monterrey. A bipod weapon-rest and shell casing were found about 70 yards away at the rear of a vacant lot, suggesting that the assassin's weapon had been a Barrett .50-caliber rifle.

The Army finally bought its own consignment of new Barrett M107s in 2014, at a cost of $14,000 apiece. And as late as June 28, 2018, it was being reported that a military *puesto de vigilancia* or "lookout post" at the kilometer 18+200 marker of the Colombia-Salinas-Victoria highway in Tamaulipas had intercepted a vehicle whose three occupants were illegally bringing seven .50-caliber Barrett rifles into Mexico.

See also: AK-47 Assault Rifle; AR-15 Rifle; Gulf Cartel: Arms Importation; *Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos*; Mossberg Shotgun.

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Beheadings (ca. 2004–Present).

Gruesome atrocities perpetrated by cartel executioners, to horrify and intimidate opponents and the public at large.

It is believed that this heartless practice was introduced to Mexico's drug wars by

Guatemalan *kaibil* mercenaries assisting the Gulf Cartel's Zeta paramilitary defenders of the disputed border-city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, during the winter of 2004–2005. These initial few butcherings of captive gunmen by opposing combatants would gradually find wider emulators, especially after the outnumbered Zetas emerged victorious by early 2007. The Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney General's Office" (PGR) recorded 32 decapitations throughout the entire country that same year, the first in office for the zealous antinarcotics campaigner President Felipe Calderón.

Such graphic executions would soon receive much greater impetus by being posted online, publicly taunting and frightening opponents, the annual figure of known beheadings soaring to roughly 500 by 2011, mostly due to a savage war raging between the Zetas and their former Gulf Cartel bosses—more than 80 others being added during April–May 2012 alone. A typical video filmed in the municipality of Río Bravo [six miles south of McAllen, Texas] was posted in late June 2012 showing five bound, shirtless young men with black "Zs" painted on their chests, kneeling in front of four masked Gulf Cartel *sicarios* holding machetes. Each captive gave his name, adding that he had been sent by Z-40 [the Zeta Cartel co-leader, Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales]. An unseen narrator thereupon declared: "You find yourselves here because you came to f**k us," after which three of the *sicarios* begin slowly hacking off heads. The narrator callously commented: "This is how all your filthy people are going to end," as the prisoners pleaded for their lives, three severed heads being help up a minute later. At least 1,300 beheadings would be recorded during the six-year term of President Calderón, with many more occurring since then.

See also: Jardines del Humaya Cemetery; Kaibiles: First Zeta Affiliations and Recruitment; Mano Con Ojos; Santería; Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie": Savage Defense of Acapulco.

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Beltrán-Leyva Organization (1997–2017).

Criminal syndicate founded and operated by four brothers, who started as Sinaloa Cartel enforcers and traffickers before finally breaking away from that group—only to be subsequently defeated and scattered.

Early Years (Late 1980s–1996)

This gang sprang from six brothers and three sisters born around the rural hamlet of La Palma, in the mountainous municipality of Badiraguato, Sinaloa [about three miles from where their cousin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán would be born]. Their parents were Carlos Beltrán Araujo and Ramona Leyva Gámez, whose eldest son—Marcos Arturo—was believed to have been born on February 5, 1958, although various other dates have been suggested, while the youngest Alfredo arrived on January 21, 1971. The family eked out a meager existence by raising small crops of marijuana and poppies, and it is believed that they helped their 15-year-old cousin, El Chapo, plant his first marijuana field in 1972.

The eldest Arturo apparently entered the more lucrative cross-border trade sometime

during the late 1980s, bringing his younger siblings, Mario Alberto, Carlos, and Héctor, into the business, serving together under their cousin "El Chapo" Guzmán (who had since become a successful trafficker of Colombian cocaine). When the latter was imprisoned in June 1993 in the "Puente Grande" federal prison at Zapotlanejo, Jalisco, Arturo and Héctor Beltrán would loyally bring him money-stuffed suitcases to pay bribes and maintain a luxurious lifestyle, while Guzmán's longtime mentor and influential Federación ally Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno ensured that his drug consignments continued to reach their destinations in the United States. The bond with this Guadalajara Cartel founder was further sealed when the youngest Beltrán Leyva sister, Gloria, married Esparragoza's son in Querétaro in 1995.

Prominence (1997–2007)

The first official notice of their criminal activities was recorded early in 1997, when the "Beltrán Leyva brothers" were named by a government informant as supervising the Mazatlán *plaza* on behalf of Juárez Cartel boss Amado Carrillo Fuentes—and when this "Lord of the Skies" suddenly died while undergoing plastic-surgery that same July 1997, intelligence analysts discovered that the far-flung operations of his strategically placed Juárez Cartel were to be shared among his brother Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo Fuentes, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, "El Azul" Esparragoza, and Arturo Beltrán Leyva.

"El Viceroy" Carrillo would soon come to dominate the core of his deceased brother's organization, while his semiautonomous Beltrán partners simultaneously maintained their loyalty to the imprisoned El Chapo—their cell not only remaining the most faithful and profitable among his holdings, but according to one contemporary observer, constituting its very *corazón* or "heart." In 2000, the Beltráns' profits soared higher after the Colombian cocaine-suppliers—annoyed with the Arellano Félix brothers of Tijuana, who were struggling to pay promptly for their loads—began redistributing shipments among other more reliable traffickers, including the Beltráns. When Guzmán escaped from confinement in January 2001, he rewarded Arturo Beltrán by promoting him to commander of his *sicarios*, which would be augmented into a substantial paramilitary force several-thousand strong after Guzmán persuaded an assembly of drug bosses—including Vicente Carrillo, Esparragoza Moreno, "El Mayo" Zambada, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, etc.—to once again form a loose alliance in October 2001 dubbed La Federación, to provide mutual assistance and combat their enemies.

The brash and aggressive Arturo Beltrán would be entrusted with leading their joint forces in seizing Nuevo León and attacking Nuevo Laredo in a concerted drive to wrest it back from the expansionistic Gulf Cartel and its elite Zeta fighters. In the autumn of 2002, he recruited an ideal confederate—Texas-born Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal, a trafficker with a dark reputation for violence, whom the Zetas had driven out of that border city—to spearhead this counteroffensive. Although "La Barbie's" campaign would eventually fail, so that Beltrán reassigned him as Acapulco's *plaza*-boss in February 2006 while assuming direct field-command himself in Tamaulipas, the outcome remained the same. [For greater details on this struggle, see "Valdez Villarreal, Édgar 'La Barbie': Sinaloa Cartel Affiliation" et seq.]

The Beltrán Leyva family, meanwhile, continued to profit handsomely as traffickers, flying cocaine-cargoes directly from South America into Toluca's international

airport (capital of the State of Mexico), while the youngest brother, Alfredo "El Mochomo" Beltrán Leyva, married a daughter of "El Chapo's" older half-brother, Ernesto Guzmán Hidalgo—being further allowed the rare privilege of building a semicircular mansion at La Palma, half-a-kilometer below the sprawling mountain-home of El Chapo's mother. Meanwhile, the increasingly flamboyant Arturo Beltrán outfitted his own personal paramilitary contingent with custom-made uniforms, identical to those of Army special-forces, complete with Velcro labels affixed to their black bulletproof vests bearing the initials "FEDA" for *Fuerzas Especiales de Arturo* or "Arturo's Special Forces."

The three-year-old battle for Nuevo Laredo finally ended when Arturo Beltrán reached a peace accord with the Zetas' Miguel Treviño in May 2007, after which Sinaloa Cartel leaders Guzmán and Zambada began to plan for assaulting Ciudad Juárez [opposite El Paso, Texas], Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo's cartel headquarters. Arturo Beltrán—grown erratic because of his deepening cocaine addiction—was not involved as a *sicario* army several thousand strong was quietly raised and trained in distant Veracruz by El Chapo's longtime friend Noel "El Flaco" Salguiero Nevárez. It was rumored that representatives of the disgruntled Beltrán brothers even held a secret meeting with Zeta bosses in Veracruz in December 2007, to tentatively discuss forming a joint super-cartel—and that when Guzmán learned of this treacherous proposal, he allegedly commented that he would have to "cut off" the Beltrán Leyva arm of his organization.

Break with El Chapo (2008)

At 7:00 a.m. on Monday, January 21, 2008, a white BMW SUV exited from a fortified residence at 1978 Juan de la Barrera Avenue in Culiacán's Colonia Burócratas, bearing the youngest Beltrán Leyva brother—Alfredo "El Mochomo"—and three *sicario* bodyguards. They promptly drove into a web of roadblocks set up overnight by 300 GAFE soldiers from the Ninth Military Zone, complete with armored Hummers, as well as Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) and Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) agents. The heavily-outnumbered criminals surrendered without firing a shot, after which $900,000 in cash—plus an AK-47 and assorted other heavy weaponry—was taken from young Alfredo's residence, furnishing legal grounds for his immediate detention without bail.

Furious, Arturo Beltrán sent his gigantic lieutenant Sergio Enrique "El Grande" or "King Kong" Villarreal Barragán that very same morning to harangue Fernando Rivera, intelligence director of the corrupt SIEDO [Subprocuraduría General de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Deputy Attorney-General's Office for Specialized Organized-Crime Investigations"] in Mexico City, demanding to know:

> *. . . who he was going to have killed. Everybody took money from him, but nobody warned him about this detention of his brother.*

Faced with Beltrán's wrath, Rivera explained that the order had come directly from the Army High Command, and by 2:00 that same afternoon of January 21, 2008, he provided Villarreal with the relevant military reports—plus a diagram showing exactly where Alfredo "El Mochomo" was being temporarily held in anticipation of being flown out of Culiacán

to Mexico City. In return for a million-peso bribe, his 11 AFI guards furthermore agreed to withdraw so that a *sicario* rescue-party could "storm" the building with the aid of a *blindado* or "armored vehicle" before dawn on January 22, 2008. Arturo Beltrán met that same night with his Federación superiors, Guzmán and Zambada, to request their help and support for such an operation—but they demurred because "conditions were not right" and felt that young Alfredo would have to be "sacrificed."

Arturo Beltrán emerged from this meeting resentful and suspicious, but suffered his brother to be carried off next morning into the much stronger Puente Grande Prison at Zapotlanejo, Jalisco. But when El Chapo's young son Iván Archibaldo "El Chapito" Guzmán Salazar was subsequently released early from the Altiplano Penitentiary that same April 2008, an increasingly paranoid Beltrán became convinced that El Chapo had sold out Alfredo in exchange for his own son's parole. Relations between the Sinaloa Cartel and its Beltrán Leyva cell deteriorated, with quotas going unpaid, drug-shipments intercepted, more *sicarios* recruited, and key auxiliaries such as pliant policemen or *blanqueadores*—literally "whiteners" or money launderers—being attacked.

[On April 18, 2008, Sinaloa Cartel lieutenant José Manuel Torres Félix survived an ambush by Beltrán gunmen in Culiacán's Montebello district, but his 20-year-old son, Atanasio "Tachío" Torres Acosta, was killed and his four-year-old daughter, Alondra, lost an arm, while his young wife narrowly escaped injury. Stricken with grief, Manuel Torres tortured some of these perpetrators to death in his own home, then waged a bloody vendetta, slaying hundreds of opponents by way of revenge, a single-minded pursuit that earned him the sobriquet of *El Ondeado* or "The Deranged."]

War against the Sinaloa Cartel (2008–2009)

On April 30, 2008, one of the incarcerated Alfredo Beltrán's sons was almost murdered when a group of armed men assaulted his residence in Culiacán's Colonia Guadalupe, only a block from city hall, being repelled by his guards. PFP agents and Army reinforcements quickly appeared and disarmed ten of these Beltrán bodyguards, so that a retaliatory counterstrike was attempted shortly thereafter against a Sinaloa Cartel leadership meeting in La Presita, north of Culiacán, resulting in yet another shootout during which two federal agents were killed. Now fully aroused, a bellicose Arturo Beltrán ordered his *sicarios* to begin attacking police officers at random, plus posting threatening *narcomantas* in public places accusing the authorities of serving the interests of "El Chapo" Guzmán. Next day, May 1, 2008, four PFP officers were killed while on patrol in central Culiacán, as well as two municipal policemen in Imala, while four others were abducted—their mangled bodies being found a week later.

Amid these heated hostilities, the Beltrán brothers even dispatched a hit-squad to vengefully ambush 41-year-old Édgar Eusebio Millán Gómez—acting PFP *comisionado* or "commissioner"—as he returned to his home at 132 Camelia Street in Mexico City's Colonia Guerrero at 5:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 8, 2008. Upon exiting his white Chevy Trailblazer, Millán found three *sicarios* waiting inside who hit him with eight mortal rounds, while his two police bodyguards were injured (although they managed to wound and capture one of his

assassins). And at 8:30 p.m. that very same Thursday, some 15 Beltrán gunmen fired more than 500 rounds from AK-47s and grenade launchers to disperse the bodyguards protecting "El Chapo" Guzmán's 22-year-old son by his second wife, Édgar Guzmán López, then perforated his armored white Ford Lobo in a supermarket parking-lot in northern Culiacán—instantly killing the young man and two companions.

War became fully joined, "El Chapo" Guzmán's allies even being obliged at first to abandon their operations in Sinaloa's capital and retreat into Navolato. Gradually, though, their powerful and well-organized cartel gained the upper hand, while Arturo Beltrán was increasingly erratic and unfocused as his cocaine addiction worsened, subject to deepening bouts of paranoia and volatile mood-swings which handicapped his efforts.

Death of Arturo Beltrán, "Boss of Bosses" (Christmas 2009)

Despite being engaged in a full-blown war against the Sinaloa Cartel and the most-wanted man in Mexico, Arturo Beltrán indulgently decided to host a *posada* or "Christmas party" on December 11, 2009, at his house in the luxurious gated-community of Ahuatepec near Tepoztlán (just outside Cuernavaca, Morelos), protected by his chief-of-security, "La Barbie" Valdez, with two-dozen bodyguards roaming the grounds. Entertainment was provided by the Texas-based musician Ramón Ayala, Los Bravos del Norte, and Los Cadetes de Linares, as well as more than 20 strippers and prostitutes. But elite naval special-forces surrounded this house and tried to capture the cartel boss, although he and Valdez managed to escape during an exchange of gunfire that left three *sicarios* dead (along with an innocent next-door neighbor), plus 11 others detained, as well as the confiscation of $280,000 in cash, 16 AK-47s and AR-15s, 74 magazines of ammunition, and 1,700 rounds.

Intelligence operatives nonetheless kept track of Beltrán's movements, and next week traced him to another luxurious apartment-complex named "Altitude" in Cuernavaca's Colonia Lomas de la Selva, where the drug baron was inside Apartment 201 of one of its five residential towers called "Elbus"—preparing for a second time to host his Christmas party, its anticipated guest-of-honor being General Leopoldo Díaz Pérez, commander of the 24th Military Zone. On this occasion, the so-called "Boss of Bosses" was guarded by four *sicarios* inside the apartment, with additional gunmen and lookouts stationed in perimeters outside the building. A 90-minute shootout nonetheless erupted at 3:00 p.m. on December 16, 2009, when about 200 *marinos*, two Navy Mil Mi-17 helicopters, and two small tanks stormed the complex.

Approximately 20 fragmentation-grenades were fired back by Beltrán's gunmen in a vain attempt to stem this assault, during which their boss allegedly phoned and asked his absent security-chief La Barbie to bring more men to extricate him. Instead, Valdez counseled surrender, but Beltrán stubbornly fought on and was killed along with four companions, including his top lieutenant Miguel Ángel "El Buche" Araujo Moreno. Among the items seized afterward were $40,000 in cash, several thousand Canadian dollars, five AK-47s and AR-15s, plus a variety of dark religious scapulars and medallions—some related to the cult of Santa Muerte. [In one final bizarre touch, someone would place a head adorned with "a decorative flower tucked

behind one ear" in January 2010 beside Beltrán's garish tomb in Culiacán's "Jardines del Humaya" Cemetery, its decapitated corpse being found at the opposite end of this graveyard, suggesting that some of his former gang-members may have presented this gory tribute as a ghoulish offering.]

Decline and Dissolution (2010–Present)

Whether Valdez's absence on the fateful afternoon that Arturo Beltrán died was deliberate or not, Héctor "El Ingeniero" or "El H"—the Beltrán brother who inherited command of their organization—immediately blamed La Barbie and put out the word that he wanted him killed (especially after another brother, Carlos Alberto Beltrán Leyva, was also arrested in Culiacán by the Policía Federal on December 30, 2009). But with the ferocious Arturo Beltrán removed, Valdez was able to extract his Acapulco cell from Beltrán Leyva domination and proclaim his own Cártel Independiente, while other groups began falling away as well, greatly debilitating the entire organization. In order to prevail in the coming struggle to regain control over various fragments splintering off in Guerrero, Morelos, the State of Mexico, and Nuevo León, Héctor Beltrán and his second-in-command, Sergio "El Grande" Villarreal, decided to join their former Zeta foes against La Barbie and his own formidable ally, a former Beltrán underboss named Gerardo "El Indio" Álvarez Vázquez.

La Barbie soon found his hold on Acapulco challenged from every direction, numerous subordinates rebelling and attacking his loyalists, while his second-in-command, "El Indio" Álvarez, was apprehended on April 21, 2010. Valdez mounted a desperate defense, but hostilities led to hundreds of deaths, with more decapitated bodies left dangling from bridges and Acapulco's tourism plunging until his arrest on August 30, 2010. The surviving Beltrán leadership was also dealt their own telling blow two weeks afterward, when Sergio Villarreal was taken along with two companions by 30 *marinos* in five vehicles (including armored personnel-carriers and a helicopter) who penetrated his rented mansion at 3 Privada de Mercaderes in the luxurious "Puerta de Hierro" gated community in the city of Puebla around 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 12, 2010, confiscating various weapons and ammunition, plus an armored Audi A6 and Land Rover.

Despite La Barbie's defeat, the Beltráns were not strong enough to prevent more cells from breaking their affiliations and setting up independently, such as:

- La Oficina or "The Office" in Aguascalientes
- Cártel de la Sierra or "Mountains Cartel," Cártel del Pacífico Sur or "South Pacific Cartel," Guardianes Morelenses or "Morelian Guards," and La Barredora or the "Street-Sweeper" in Morelos
- Guerreros Unidos or "United Warriors," and Rojos or "Reds" in Morelos and Guerrero
- La Nueva Administración or "New Administration" in Morelos and Mexico City
- Mano con Ojos and Cártel del Centro or "Central Cartel" in the Estado de México and Mexico City
- Pelones or "Buzz-Cuts" in the Estado de México, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Morelos
- Mazatlecos and Limpia Mazatleca in Sinaloa and Nayarit
- Cártel de La Mochomera, briefly led in 2013 by Fausto Isidro "El Chapo Isidro" Meza Flores and Alfredo "El Junior" Beltrán Guzmá [a *mochomera* being a

ravenous swarm of large, fierce, red *mochomo* ants indigenous to Sonora's deserts]

["Mazatleco" is a word identifying any person or thing from the Pacific port-city of Mazatlán. As long ago as 2000, Arturo Beltrán had rewarded the skillful services of his brave and cunning *sicario* Fausto Isidro "El Chapo Isidro" Meza Flores by allowing him to raise a group called "Los Mazatlecos" in the municipality of Guasave where he had been born, about 40 miles southeast of Los Mochis, creating his own cell. It would be one of the few affiliates to survive the Beltráns' disintegration, largely because its leadership consisted of Meza Flores, his wife, parents, sisters, and uncles—proving impossible to penetrate.]

Most of these factions would turn out to be too small to resist rival gangs or government forces, so that many quickly disappeared. The family nevertheless still led the depleted Beltrán-Leyva Organization's remnants, although driven into exile in Guadalajara. Héctor Beltrán was captured while eating shrimp on October 1, 2014, in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, along with his financial manager, Germán Goyeneche Ortega—both being immediately charged because of the firearms found in their possession. Next month, the incarcerated Alfredo "El Mochomo" Beltrán was furthermore extradited to the United States.

A couple of years later, El Mochomo's inexperienced son—24-year-old Alfredo "El Mochomito" or "Tito" Beltrán Guzmán, a great-nephew of "El Chapo" Guzmán—would try to resurrect the family's fortunes by boldly sending 50 gunmen to raid the Guzmáns' mountaintop La Tuna retreat in the municipality of Badiraguato, rampaging there unchallenged for a week before withdrawing. But still facing defeat against the Sinaloa Cartel for control over Nayarit's drug-traffic, El Mochomito next orchestrated the kidnapping of El Chapo's sons Iván Archivaldo and Jesús Alfredo from Puerto Vallarta's La Leche restaurant on August 15, 2016, releasing them a week later in exchange for a ransom.

Both actions were viewed as humiliations for the once all-powerful Sinaloans, but El Mochomito overreached when he directed his subordinate Juan Francisco "El Chico" Patrón Sánchez to ambush an Army column on the outskirts of Culiacán at dawn on September 30, 2016, so as to blame this attack on El Chapo's sons. Five young soldiers having been killed and ten others badly wounded, the authorities responded angrily and soon discovered the truth, after which the military set about vengefully hunting down its true perpetrators. El Mochomito was apprehended by naval special-forces in Zapopan, Jalisco, on Friday, December 9, 2016, bringing an end to his brief tenure as cartel boss, while Patrón Sánchez and 13 of his *sicarios* were massacred in a public shootout in Tepic, Nayarit, on February 9, 2017.

See also: Badiraguato; Jardines del Humaya Cemetery; Mano con Ojos; Tepic Strafing.

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Black-Tar Heroin—see "Heroin"

Body Disposals. Heartless by-product of cartel violence, especially those operating in a limited area who wished to get rid of victims along with any incriminating evidence.

Early gangs would simply discard corpses in out-of-the-way corners of municipal dumps, any odor being masked by the overall stench, although repeated drop-offs could result in discovery. As cartels grew more vicious, mass-graves began to appear in lonely rural areas—more than 1,300 having been found to date, holding 26,000 unidentified corpses—while the brutal Arellano Félix founders of the Tijuana Cartel began employing even more sophisticated methods, as did the Gulf Cartel and its cruel Zeta paramilitary during their successful defense of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, in 2004–2005. And after the drug wars escalated in scope and fury as of December 2006, it is estimated that some 188,000 more people have been killed—2,073 in July 2016 alone—and almost 37,400 others disappeared (6,131 in the battleground state of Tamaulipas).

Bodies Intended to Be Found: *Encajuelados*, *Encobijados*, *Encintados*, *Entambados*

Cartel bosses sometimes want their victims found, such as when Osiel Cárdenas Guillén had his partner Ángel Salvador "El Chava" Gómez Herrera murdered and left posed in a pasture outside Matamoros, with a gun in his right hand as if a suicide, in late June 1999; but when several days elapsed and the remains had not yet been discovered, Cárdenas instructed that an anonymous tip be phoned into the State Attorney-General's Office. [For greater details, see "Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel: Murder of 'El Chava' Gómez."]

Other corpses are deliberately left in public, intended to convey a warning or threat, sometimes in the trunk or *cajuela* of a parked car and therefore known as *encajuelados* (an invented term). Newspapers reported how the body of Federal prosecutor Luis Manuel Balmori Garza was "found *encajuelado* along with his brother José" on February 17, 2013, inside a car abandoned on the highway traversing the municipality of Ciénega de Flores into Nuevo Laredo—ominously adding that their other brother, Roberto, that city's director of public safety, was also missing.

Bodies publicly dumped shrouded in blankets or sheets are referred to as *encobijados* or "blanketed," while *encintados* or "taped" victims have been suffocated by being wrapped head-to-toe in industrial tape. Remains sealed up inside 50-gallon drums or *tambores* are referred to as *entambados*, a play on the word *entumbado* or "entombed."

Bodies Intended to Disappear: *Baños*, *Guisos*, *Licuados*

Many more victims have their remains obliterated by such callous disposals as *baños* or "baths," a cruel euphemism among cartel executioners for immersing corpses in a drum of diesel or other combustible, then setting it alight so as to burn away all evidence of a murder. G*uisos* or "stews" describe a similar reduction of a victim's remains into an unrecognizable mass, such as when four Zeta hit-men—interrogated on videotape in May 2005—said that their

duties included taking kidnap-victims for a *guiso.* When asked what that meant, they explained:

> *It's when they grab someone, they get information about moving drugs or money, they get what they want, and then—after torturing him—they execute him. They take him to a ranch or one of those places, they shoot him in the head, they throw him in a drum, and they burn him with different fuels like diesel and gasoline.*

Corpses liquefied in caustic soda or some other chemical broth were sometimes referred to as *licuados*—actually the name for blended juice-drinks or smoothies made with milk, fruit, and ice, sold in many markets or by street vendors. A Tijuana Cartel member named Iván Aarón Loaiza Espinoza declared during a 2005 police interrogation in Mexicali how he had been taken to one of the gang's safe-houses:

> *. . . known as Los Licuados, because that was where they turned people into pozole, meaning that they disintegrated the corpses of kidnap victims. My first job was to help weld the drums together, because you need two to fit whole bodies inside.*

Pozole (2009)

All of Mexico would be horrified to learn of the macabre *pozoles* "cooked" by Tijuana Cartel executioners, the original term describing an ancient Aztec dish—a delicious soup whose recipe dates back centuries—traditionally prepared by soaking corn-kernels overnight in salt water, causing them to swell into large white shapes by morning. These then serve as starch for a soup prepared by boiling cuts of pork in a pot of water, to which are added chilies, onions, garlic, red salsa, etc. The meat breaks down into soft shreds amid a reddish broth, to which the corn is added. Upon being served, each bowl is garnished with personal choices such as shredded lettuce, chopped onion and radishes, avocado chunks, etc., plus squeezed lime-juice.

But gruesome cartel *pozoles* were revealed when an Army contingent from the Second Military Zone arrested Santiago "El Chago" or "El Pozolero" Meza López during a drunken orgy in Ensenada on January 22, 2009—this inebriated 32-year-old construction worker and bricklayer originally from Guamúchil, Sinaloa, confessing that he had dissolved hundreds if not thousands of corpses as a part-time cartel job over a nine-year span, for a weekly salary of $600. He described his technique as taking delivery of a body or bodies at night (usually sent by the brothers Teodoro "El Teo" or Manuel "El Muletas" García Simental, high-ranking enforcers for the Arellanos) and driving this "merchandise" to his desolate yard in a slum called "Ojo de Agua" in Colonia Mariano Matamoros on Tijuana's east side, along the road leading toward Tecate.

There, "El Pozolero" would half-fill a 200-liter tub with water, to which he would add two large sacks of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide), plus cut-up body parts. This mixture would then be boiled for eight hours over an open flame, its stench masked by the smell from an adjacent goat-farm, until only teeth, nails, and a few bone fragments were left floating in a disgusting, reddish liquid mass—whose stinking similarity to a foul *pozole* led hardhearted gangsters to describe such overnight sessions as "making *pozole*." Finally, according to Meza López, he would pour his results into 50-gallon drums, to be disposed of elsewhere on his "Ojo de Agua" property, or removed by cartel drivers and dumped at various remote spots, sometimes at a small

ranch by the Boulevard 2000 on Tijuana's outskirts.

See also: Arellano-Félix Organization; Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel: Murder of "El Chava" Gómez; Iguala Mass Abduction; Tijuana or Arellano Cartel.

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It is a struggle that has exhausted our government and armed forces, but has shown no reduction in the consumption of drugs, or availability of drugs in America.

—Carlos Navarrete, president of the Mexican Senate (2010)

Caballeros Templarios—see "Familia Michoacana Cartel: Reincarnation as Knights Templar"

Cabañas Shooting (2010). Attempted murder of a famous soccer star—top scorer for the first-division Club América team—by a thuggish regional Beltrán Leyva underboss.

Following a night of heavy drinking in the after-hours Bar-Bar nightclub in the Delegación Álvaro Obregón in southern Mexico City, José Jorge "El J. J." Balderas Garza—local boss in charge of drug sales for Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal in the well-to-do establishments of Polanco, Tlalpan, and Insurgentes Sur, as well as the capital's neighboring municipalities of Naucalpan de Juárez, Tlalnepantla de Baz, Atizapán de Zaragoza, and Cuautitlán Izcalli—confronted the 29-year-old Paraguayan Salvador "Chava" Cabañas Ortega in the men's room around 5:15 a.m. on Monday, January 25, 2010, pointing his .38-caliber gun at the player's forehead while complaining that this foreign star had taken a spot which should have gone to a Mexican. After four minutes of tense exchanges, the drunken hoodlum shot Cabañas once in the head and left him for dead, although the soccer player in fact survived (being found in time by his wife, María Alonso Mena, and brother-in-law Amacio Rojas Fernández, who had accompanied him to the club that night).

Because of this brutal assault on such a famous personage, Balderas was forced to go into hiding, so that his boss, La Barbie, initially stashed him in a Cuajimalpa apartment, then moved him to Atizapán, before finally depositing him in a luxurious home in Mexico City's exclusive Bosques de las Lomas neighborhood. Balderas eventually emerged to resume his drug operations from his Huixquilucan headquarters in the neighboring State of Mexico (a horseshoe-shaped jurisdiction curling around Mexico City), until he was apprehended at his Lomas residence by the Policía Federal on the afternoon of January 18, 2011. He thereupon denied being the shooter, instead trying to blame his bodyguard Francisco José "El Contador" Barreto García for his own cowardly crime. Balderas was nevertheless sentenced five days later to confinement in El Altiplano maximum-security prison on a wide variety of charges. Cabañas had, meanwhile, made a miraculous recovery, but was never able to resume his top-flight athletic career, soon sinking into bankruptcy and oblivion.

See also: Beltrán-Leyva Organization; Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie."

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Cadereyta-Jiménez Massacre (May 2012)—see "Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Civil War"

Calderón Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesús (1962–Present). 56th President of Mexico, who ratcheted up the "War on Drugs"—at considerable cost and with only limited success.

Birth and Early Career (1962–2004)

Born in the ancient and beautiful city of Morelia, Michoacán, on August 18, 1962, he was the youngest of five brothers sired by Carmen Hinojosa Calderón and Luis Calderón Vega, cofounder of the conservative Partido Accionista Nacional or "National Actionist Party" (PAN). Despite the stranglehold on Mexican political power long held by the corrupt ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional or "Institutional Revolutionary Party" (PRI), Calderón's father was popular enough locally to win various state posts, and his youngest son would spend his teenage years actively supporting his father's campaigns and helping promote the party.

Young Felipe moved to Mexico City to attend college, where he received a bachelor's degree in law from the prestigious Escuela Libre de Derecho or "Free School of Law," and later a master's degree in economics from the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México or "Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico" (ITAM), plus a master's of public administration in 2000 from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

In his early 20s, Calderón served as president of the PAN youth movement during the 1980s, and later won a couple of elections to state representative, before serving as national president of PAN from 1996 to 1999. Soon after Vicente Fox took office in December 2000 as the party's first elected president, Calderón was rewarded by being appointed director of the federally-owned developmental bank known as Banobras. He then joined Fox's cabinet as secretary of energy, before resigning in May 2004 to protest against the president's criticism of his own presidential ambitions.

Disputed Election (2005–2006)

Calderón's path to Mexico's highest office was a difficult one, beginning with the fact that the leader of his own PAN party—the sitting president, Vicente Fox—preferred another candidate to succeed him in office. Calderón nonetheless won PAN's candidacy in a series of three hard-fought primary victories, much to the surprise of many analysts, and then performed well during the initial presidential debates. Eventually, his lead in the polls was eroded by his main opponent, the leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática or "Party of the Democratic Revolution" (PRD), so that when the national elections were held in July 2006, they ended in a virtual tie. It was not until two months later—on September 5, 2006—that the Federal Electoral Tribunal at last declared Calderón the winner by a razor-thin plurality of 35.89 percent of the popular vote, a mere 0.58 percent ahead of López Obrador.

The latter immediately alleged fraud and refused to concede, leading to several months of heated protests in Mexico City, the seat of López Obrador's political power. The PRD opposition to Calderón's claim of victory even threatened to prevent his official swearing-in as president on December 1, 2006, by disrupting the televised ceremony held before the Chamber of Deputies, as required in Mexico's constitution. Consequently, on the evening of November 30, 2006, Calderón and Fox appeared on national television standing together, at which the outgoing president removed his ceremonial tricolor presidential sash and handed it to a cadet, who in turn passed it over to Calderón. Fox then gave a short speech declaring that his mandate was officially at an end, followed by a statement from Calderón that he would nevertheless attend the inauguration ceremony in the Chamber of Deputies the next day, while calling for a peaceful transition.

Antidrug Commitment (2006–2012)

Having won the presidency by only the narrowest of margins, Calderón—a mild-mannered political moderate—chose to inaugurate his six-year term in office with a robust military campaign aimed against the cartels, as a means of imbuing his administration with an aura of strength and purpose. Despite the best efforts of his predecessor, Vicente Fox, these criminal organizations had grown in wealth and power over the preceding six years, with their territorial disputes creating such a wave of unfettered violence that more than 3,000 murders remained unsolved by the time that Calderón assumed his title—500 in his own native Michoacán, where the Gulf and Sinaloa Cartels, Zetas, and newly-emergent Familia Michoacana were fighting for dominance.

On his very first day as president, Calderón signed a bill increasing the pay of the armed forces and Federal Police, and then gave orders to immediately begin deploying a large contingent of troops into that troubled region. Even before they could arrive in Michoacán, agents from the attorney-general's Ministerio Público Federal seized a cargo of 20 tons of pseudo-ephedrine from China in the port-city of Lázaro Cárdenas on December 5, 2006, a capture that would allow the federal authorities to close down a clandestine rural lab converting these chemicals into methamphetamines in the hamlet of Cheranguerán, along the Uruapan-to-Carápan highway.

Then on Friday, December 8, 2006, the first contingents of *Operación Conjunta "Michoacán"* or *Operativo Conjunto "Michoacán"* (Joint Operation "Michoacán") began flooding into that state, and by next Monday—December 11—had set up their camps and command-post at Apatzingán, headquarters for the 43rd Military Zone under General Alonso Garrido, their manpower consisting of:

- 4,260 Army troops aboard 246 vehicles, supported by 17 aircraft and 29 helicopters;
- 1,054 naval *infantería de marina* or "marines," supported by seven MI-17 helicopters; two Bolco helicopters; two Aviocard patrol-aircraft fitted with night-vision cameras; three interceptor planes; a patrol boat; 35 amphibious Commando craft; plus 17 support vehicles;
- 1,420 Federal Police officers, including 300 of the Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police," as well as 220 undercover Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI) or "Federal Investigative Agency" agents, accompanied by six helicopters and ten canine units;

- plus 50 agents from the attorney-general's Ministerio Público Federal.

These units had been sent to bolster the overwhelmed local police forces, and Calderón visited their forward base at Apatzingán on January 3, 2007.

That previous day, he had also ordered a separate large deployment into the violence-plagued of city of Tijuana, Baja California—the first 300 Federal Police officers of this so-called Operativo "Tijuana" having arrived in that border-city that same Tuesday, January 2, 2007, followed by 200 AFI and PFP agents. Soon, a total of 2,620 soldiers supported by 21 airplanes, nine helicopters, 28 boats, 247 military vehicles, plus sophisticated drug-detecting sensors had been dispatched, along with a large patrol boat, three smaller patrol craft, one helicopter, two support vehicles, and 162 marines contributed by the Navy. Despite immediately disarming numerous corrupt municipal policemen, this campaign would prove disorganized and ineffectual, with criminals openly taunting its members over their own radio networks. Morale collapsed and as early as May 2007, Calderón was obliged to ask the city's disappointed residents to be patient, declaring that "it might not be during his administration when the results of these operations would be seen."

He nonetheless continued to apply every resource at his disposal in an all-out, aggressive "war against drug traffickers," such as instructing his attorney-general to revive the outdated judicial practice of *arraigos*, court-orders for the "preventive detention" of uncooperative witnesses or defiant defendants in difficult cases. The number of such *arraigados*—not charged with any crime, yet detained *bajo arraigo* or "under *arraigo*"—would quickly rise to 703 in 2007, 1,111 by 2008, 1,517 in 2009, 1,679 by 2010, and 1,933 in 2011. [Calderón's successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, would discontinue this extralegal tactic nine days after assuming office, instructing his own attorney-general, Jesús Murillo Karam, on December 10, 2012, to gradually phase out the use of *arraigos*, so that the number of such detainees would fall to 534 by 2013, 264 in 2014, 83 by 2015, and a mere 25 in 2016.]

A total of 49,000 soldiers would be redistributed to numerous points around Mexico during Calderón's first three years in office, and numerous high-profile apprehensions made, such as the capture of Alfredo "El Mochomo" Beltrán Leyva on January 21, 2008, as well as the brother and son of the Sinaloa Cartel's Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada in October 2008 and April 2009, respectively. However, because of frequent security-leaks from the senior Army hierarchy, Calderón bolstered the numbers and funding of naval special-forces and committed their strike teams to frontline duties, achieving a string of spectacular successes starting with the death of the formidable Arturo Beltrán Leyva in December 2009.

Assessment (2012–Present)

Nevertheless, Calderón's aggressive administration would be dubbed the *Sexenio de la Muerte* or "Six-Year Term of Death" because of its staggering toll of more than 104,000 civilian lives, with another 14,000 listed as "missing"—critics further adding that despite deploying more than 100,000 military and naval personnel throughout this period, Mexico had gone from having seven major drug-cartels and 19 autonomous cells at his inauguration, to seven cartels and 200 significant gangs or cells by its conclusion, so that the amount of narcotics being produced and violence suffered

remained unaffected. His successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, would use 52,000 soldiers and 16,000 naval personnel to target kingpins, killing or capturing 100 of the 129 most wanted—yet the number of murders increased appreciably throughout his six years as well (including 1,300 decapitations), as leaderless groups simply fragmented into smaller cells to continue operating, his otherwise successful campaign having resulted in "fewer drug lords, but more violence."

See also: Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI); Ephedrine Intercept; Familia Michoacana Cartel; GAFE: Sagging Morale and Contraction et seq.; GANFE: Transfer from Army to Navy Control; Infantería de Marina: Inter-Service Competition.

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Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki" (1947–1985).

Mexican-born DEA agent tortured to death by the Guadalajara Cartel, provoking a wrathful retaliation from the U.S. government.

Birth and Early Career (1947–1980)

Born on July 26, 1947, in the northwestern border-city of Mexicali, Baja California, he was one of four brothers and seven sisters who would eventually constitute the family of Daniel Camarena and Dora Salazar Soto. His nickname "Kiki" was retained from his infantile mispronunciation of his own name, "Enrique." The family moved to the United States in 1956 and obtained American citizenship, so that ten years later he graduated from Calexico High School. In 1966, the teenage Kiki joined the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, his older brother Eduardo or "Lalo" having been killed in that Southeast Asian country the previous year. After a two-year stint during which he rose to corporal, serving as a legal clerk and receiving the National Defense Service Medal, Kiki Camarena returned to civilian life. From 1970 onward, he worked successively as a Calexico fireman, police officer, and an Imperial County Deputy Sheriff in nearby El Centro, before finally joining the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in June 1974.

His first station as a special agent had been his hometown of Calexico, after which he was reassigned in 1977 to the DEA's Fresno District Office in Northern California, working in collaboration with local policemen to make buys of Mexican heroin from street dealers. During these early years of the drug trade, such work was not the dangerous occupation that it would later become, most officers making undercover purchases while only lightly armed with their personal sidearms and no body armor. The greatest dangers were from distrustful participants who arrived at deals armed with Colt .38s or an occasional AK-47, so as to preclude being robbed or victimized.

Intelligence Work in Mexico (June 1980–May 1984)

Likeable, quick-witted, and dedicated, Camarena soon began making connections among Beltrán-Leyva traffickers out of Tijuana, and also came to be loaned out to

other police agencies around California, as they sought to discover the source of the swelling volume of narcotics entering the Central Valley. Early in 1980, Camarena was contacted by a fellow DEA agent serving in Mexico, who suggested that he volunteer for a transfer to Guadalajara, Jalisco's state capital and an attractive city featuring palatial private homes owned by such notorious drug lords as Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, and Rafael Caro Quintero.

Camarena's transfer-orders came through by June 1980, directing him to join the DEA's five-man Resident Office in the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara. Prohibited by treaty from making arrests, bearing firearms, or doing undercover work, this intelligence unit—along with another 30 DEA agents scattered throughout other Mexican cities, plus 20 more shuttling in and out of the United States in support—were assigned to gather and collate information, which they would then furnish to the Federal Judicial Police in Mexico City to make actual arrests for criminal offenses.

In early 1982, the Guadalajara team launched into Operation "Godfather," a complex scheme intended to acquire intelligence about the drug operations being covertly directed by the secretive Guadalajara Cartel *padrino* Félix Gallardo, which were already much more sizable and lucrative than anyone realized at DEA headquarters in Washington. Camarena—although known to local cartel members as an American operative, thanks to the many informants among the Mexican police-agencies with whom he worked—was nonetheless viewed as a harmless analyst, deskbound and given to complaints about his lack of a diplomatic passport or pay inequities (FBI agents receiving an extra $25,000 a year to serve in Mexico, unlike DEA agents), while his office's results seemed desultory and harmless.

Yet beneath this cover story, Camarena was conducting his duties with great zeal and initiative, venturing well beyond Guadalajara to make inquiries. As early as May 1982, he had been tipped off to the existence of a sophisticated 220-acre marijuana plantation in distant San Luis Potosí, only to be frustrated at his inability to persuade his DEA superiors to lay his report before the Federal Attorney-General's Office in Mexico City, because of a lack of confirmatory evidence. Four long months would elapse before Camarena could finally accumulate sufficient proof for seven Mexican Army helicopters to descend upon this grow-farm in early September 1982, seizing 4,000 tons of high-grade *sinsemilla* marijuana; but he was disappointed to learn that despite featuring barracks and kitchens capable of housing at least 100 workers, this vast complex had been found deserted, its managers having been forewarned that same morning, escaping along with a considerable amount of refined product.

Over the next couple of years, Camarena and his colleagues would be repeatedly vexed by such setbacks: patiently amassing intelligence, despite many diplomatic obstacles—plus doubts and indifference from DEA headquarters in Washington—only to then see their findings shared out among corrupt Mexican officials, who would warn cartel bosses and undermine any significant captures. Camarena consequently became more venturesome in his fieldwork, ignoring DEA directives and Mexican restrictions by personally befriending Captain Alfredo Zavala Avelar—a retired Mexican Air Force pilot who was flying small planes for the Federal Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos or "Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic

Resources" (SARH), as well as charter flights for drug lords—going up with him on numerous occasions to take aerial photographs of huge marijuana plantations.

In November 1983, Camarena drove his family home to Calexico for Thanksgiving, deliberately traversing northern Mexico so as to visit the major smuggling-hub of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. The DEA office in El Paso, Texas—directly opposite that notorious border-city—told him about an informant willing to reveal yet another extensive marijuana grow-operation being created by Caro Quintero around Fresnillo, Zacatecas, which Camarena decided to investigate undercover upon his return (in contravention of DEA policy and treaty agreements). Relying on not being recognized so far from Guadalajara, he had himself introduced under the pseudonym "Xavier Quintero" on December 9, 1983, to Manuel Chávez—property manager for Caro Quintero's sprawling new Fresnillo operations, Camarena's cover-story being that he wished to purchase several ounces of heroin to sell as a freelance dealer in Texas.

He was thus able to make several more visits to Chávez, during which Camarena learned many details about Caro Quintero's new Zacatecan venture: the drug lord had drawn together two-dozen Guadalajara Cartel associates—big, medium, and small operators—to pool their resources and jointly finance the purchase and cultivation of thousands of acres of *sinsemilla* marijuana-plantations throughout rural Zacatecas, Durango, and Chihuahua. Their arrangement minimized the usual rivalries over shipments and routes, as every investor would have a proportionate share of the overall profits. The corrupt local Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" (DFS) commander at Fresnillo, Felipe Aparicio Núñez, had been paid 50 million pesos in seed money from Caro Quintero's consortium to buy up ranches, after which trained agronomists were brought in, wells for water dug, electric pumps installed, many tons of high-grade fertilizer bought, and modern farm-machinery acquired to ensure the highest-possible yields. The resultant harvests were to be stored underground in silos invisible from the air, to be hauled away by relays of 18-wheelers, while 250 AK-47s had been provided for guards to defend these properties, as well as citizen-band radios for the managers.

An aerial reconnaissance made by Camarena in mid-March 1984, and a second on April 19, 1984, revealed many bright-green marijuana crops budding north and northwest of Fresnillo, but Camarena wanted to wait until the September harvest had commenced before informing the *federales* in Mexico City, so as to ensure a richer haul—but his report was revealed prematurely by his DEA superiors. Soldiers, plus scores of Judicial Police and DFS agents under *comandante* Miguel Aldana Ibarra [a Guadalajara Cartel informant], materialized around Fresnillo on May 28, 1984, sweeping through its adjoining desert to seize 20 tons of refined marijuana, three tons of marijuana seeds, 200 liters of hashish oil, and 117 detainees—a significant but much smaller haul than the DEA agent had expected. Worse still, Camarena had ignored protocol and flown in with the *federales* as an observer, and his American colleagues worried that he might have been recognized by Caro Quintero's captive overseer, Manuel Chávez—soon to be released.

Vulnerability and Exposure (June 1984–January 1985)

Stung by their financial losses in Zacatecas, Caro Quintero and his Guadalajara Cartel

co-investors demanded to know from their police informers which DEA agent had been responsible for this intelligence coup. Although not initially suspected, Camarena would sometimes be tailed around Guadalajara as of June 1984 by DFS agents; but when his fellow agent Philip Jordan from the El Paso office commented on this rather ominous development, he dismissed his colleague's concern with the words: "It's nothing, just some DFS agents who want to see what we're doing." In fact, Camarena was running his own informant within the local Federal Judicial Police headquarters, who kept him apprised of what they were seeking. He also learned that Caro Quintero and his associates were continuing to establish more large plantations throughout the desert states of Chihuahua, Sonora, and Baja California.

As more seizures followed, tensions mounted that summer of 1984 for the DEA officers in Guadalajara. One of their Mexican informants was abducted on September 30, 1984, tortured, and killed; then a car slid past the Guadalajara residence of another DEA agent, Roger Knapp, at 7:10 a.m. on October 10, 1984, firing a 30-round clip into the door of his parked car. Knapp and his family would be recalled to Texas shortly thereafter. The cartel bosses persisted in trying to unmask the anonymous DEA agent behind their major marijuana losses at Fresnillo—especially Caro Quintero, personally embarrassed because his cartel friends had suffered significant financial losses as a result.

A much heavier blow was dealt to Caro Quintero on the morning of November 9, 1984, when the Army and Federal Police surprised another of his vast desert operations around the sleepy hamlet of Búfalo, near the cities of Jiménez and Camargo in the southern part of Chihuahua, scattering thousands of field-hands and destroying approximately 8,500 tons of high-quality seedless marijuana, with an estimated street-value of $2.5 billion. Camarena and his detachment had not actually been involved in detecting this particular plantation, its presence having been denounced by a runaway cook to the DEA office in Hermosillo, Sonora. [In fact, at the time of the Búfalo raid, the Guadalajara agents had been coordinating the apprehension of two of Félix Gallardo's light aircraft, one carrying $3.7 million cash out of California on November 17, 1984, plus a second one with 173 kilos of cocaine alighting nine days later in Mohave County, Arizona.]

The cartel's anger at its ongoing setbacks was nonetheless felt in Guadalajara. While breakfasting in the Camelot restaurant/bar near the U.S. Consulate with his DEA colleagues on January 3, 1985, Camarena was presented with an envelope containing evidence of police payoffs, by an informant named Antonio Vargas—who departed and was promptly shot eight times only two blocks away by a pair of gunmen, barely surviving. A half-dozen private U.S. residents or visitors to Guadalajara were also murdered this same month, such as an American writer named John Walker and his Mexican-American medical student friend Alberto Radelat, who stumbled into a party being hosted by traffickers in La Langosta restaurant on January 30, 1985—where they were beaten and stabbed to death as suspected DEA spies.

Brave as he was, even Camarena decided to request a transfer home, but before orders for his reassignment to San Diego could arrive, another Guadalajara Cartel meeting was held at the end of January 1985 in the drug lord Ernesto Fonseca's home, during which he announced that the unknown DEA agent had at last been unmasked. A

photograph of Camarena standing arm-in-arm with a local restaurant-owner named Antonio Padilla de la Mora was passed around the assembled bosses, who included Caro Quintero, Félix Gallardo, and Manuel "El Cochiloco" Salcido Uzeta. [Another snapshot of Camarena, apparently taken in the Federal Judicial Police headquarters in Guadalajara, would later be found in Félix Gallardo's home.] Fonseca asked for permission to have Padilla killed, but the rest demurred because this restaurant owner was working for "El Cochiloco;" however, Caro Quintero grabbed the photo of Camarena (whom he knew) and allegedly growled: "This son of a whore is going to die."

Abduction, Torture, and Murder (February 7–9, 1985)

Shortly after midday on Thursday, February 7, 1985, Camarena left the U.S. Consulate at 175 Progreso Street in downtown Guadalajara, walking two short blocks to the tiny parking-lot beside the "Camelot" restaurant at the intersection of Progreso and Libertad Streets, where his 1985 blue Ford pickup was parked, intending to meet his wife, Geneva or "Mika," for lunch. But before he could reach his vehicle (which contained a two-way radio for emergency communications), a beige Volkswagen Atlantic four-door and a black Mercury Grand Marquis with a siren intercepted him, five men known to Camarena as Jalisco State Police agents emerging and telling him: "*El comandante* wants to see you." Camarena replied that he would first have to advise his office, but the men instead pushed him into a car at gunpoint and threw a jacket over his head, beating him with pipes while speeding away.

At almost the same time, Camarena's pilot collaborator, Alfredo Zavala, was touching down at the city's Miguel Hidalgo Airport with a group of Durango businessmen, who offered Zavala a ride home. Shortly after departing the airport, a brown Ford LTD sedan intercepted them along the Chapala highway and two men armed with AR-15s alighted, forcing Zavala into their car before throwing the businessmen's car-keys into a nearby field and driving off. Both captives were taken to one of Caro Quintero's many Guadalajara properties: a large, secluded, two-story residence with a swimming pool, covered patio, aviary, and tennis court surrounded by a wall at 881 Lope de Vega Street [once owned by Rubén Zuno Arce, the corrupt brother-in-law of Mexico's ex-President Luis Echeverría] near the corner of Sol Street in Colonia Jardines del Bosque.

The drug boss welcomed the prisoners gleefully, ordering them taken to a small outbuilding or "guesthouse" at its rear for interrogation. The original intent seems to have been to extract from Camarena and Zavala, how much the American authorities knew about their cartel operations and partnerships with state and federal officials, without any consideration given toward the abduction's eventual outcome. Some junior cartel-partners were even allowed to pose questions at first to the frightened captives, and a drunken Ernesto Fonseca dropped by for a visit—who upon being informed by Caro Quintero about the DEA agent's presence, said that he felt ill from too many lemon-spirited tequilas that had triggered his citrus allergy, so he needed to sleep and would question Camarena upon awakening. But even then Fonseca did not feel well, so instead went home.

Free to vent the full fury of his wrath after his senior associate's departure, Caro Quintero—high on cocaine—had Camarena tortured with increasing savagery

throughout that entire afternoon and evening (Zavala succumbing early on, his body being callously dumped in an adjacent laundry-room). An unknown officer suspected of being ex-Federal *comandante* Sergio Espino Verdín subjected the DEA agent to an unrelenting barrage of questions, taping his replies through shrieks of pain and punctuated with insults; beatings with fists, sticks, and pipes; burning with electrical coils; ice-pick jabs; etc. Several times during this horrific ordeal, Camarena passed out, only to be revived by shots administered by Dr. Humberto Machain.

When a recuperated Fonseca returned on the morning of February 8, 1985, he found Camarena barely conscious and near death. Aghast at the inevitable consequences of such sadistic mistreatment of an American agent, Fonseca angrily reprimanded Caro Quintero and raised his hand as if to slap him—prompting Caro's henchmen to aim their weapons and Fonseca's to do the same, until the older man whirled and stomped out of the house. Meanwhile, Camarena's wife informed his DEA office that he had never appeared for their luncheon, or returned to their home that night, so other agents quickly started combing the city for both missing men. They were angered upon asking the Jalisco State Police for assistance, to be met by Director Carlos Aceves Fernández's stonewalling and disinterest; state Governor Enrique Álvarez del Castillo also did not call the U.S. Consulate to offer any help.

Early on February 9, 1985, Camarena was at last killed when a tire iron was smashed into his skull, and both bodies—still bound and gagged, clad only in their underwear—were cut up and stuffed into plastic bags to be driven out to the huge Primavera Park forest outside Guadalajara and buried in an unmarked pit. Shortly thereafter, a contingent of Federal Judicial Policemen under *comandante* Armando Pavón Reyes (accompanied by American DEA observers) arrived at Guadalajara's airport, where they saw two-dozen men armed with AK-47s guarding a private jet preparing for takeoff. After speaking with its passenger—Caro Quintero himself—Pavón shook his hand and allowed the plane to depart, much to the Americans' dismay. As his jet taxied out toward the runway, the drug lord reappeared at its door, brandishing an AK-47 and champagne bottle as he waved good-bye, flying off to lie low on his huge El Castillo ranch outside Caborca, Sonora. [For greater detail on this encounter, see "Caro Quintero, Rafael: Brazen Getaway."]

Attempted Deception and Recovered Remains (March 1985)

Caro Quintero's taunting escape only inflamed the wrath spreading in American circles about Camarena's disappearance, so that the Mexican government came under increasing pressure to intensify its efforts toward locating the missing DEA agent and bringing his abductors to justice. Unfamiliar military and police units, whose commanders were unknown to Guadalajara Cartel leaders and thus unsusceptible to bribes or threats, began flooding into Jalisco to launch a wholesale investigation of the entire criminal syndicate, setting up dragnets and making mass-arrests, while intelligence-gathering became much more effective. A worried Caro Quintero slipped away from his Caborca hideout by car to more remote Guasave, Sinaloa, where his anxiety grew.

Alarmed by this manhunt's escalating scope, other cartel partners paid compliant *judicial* officers a small fortune to fabricate a diversion, whereby these collaborators

would claim to have received an anonymous message indicating that Camarena and Zavala were being held at the Bravo drug-gang's ranch in La Angostura, Michoacán, about 60 miles southeast of Guadalajara. PJF agents would then raid that compound, eliminate the gang, and "discover" the buried bodies—at which point the DEA could be notified and the case closed prematurely, with the dead Bravos providing convenient scapegoats. This assault was duly mounted on March 5, 1985, all Bravo gang-members being killed, as well as one PJF agent; however, Camarena's and Zavala's corpses could not be found on its grounds, because the men hired to disinter and relocate their remains had left them beside a nearby road.

Shortly thereafter, a passerby spotted the two dismembered and partially-decomposed bodies, still wrapped in plastic bags. Unidentified, they were removed to a local morgue to be autopsied, while the DEA was advised of this discovery and an FBI forensic team arrived in Guadalajara on March 7, 1985, to learn that a second autopsy had already been performed. The FBI specialists proceeded to the morgue to identify the cadavers and process any evidence that might remain and, after many bureaucratic delays, were allowed to act. Meanwhile, Caro Quintero's fears climaxed, so that he prepared to flee the country.

American Vengeance (Spring 1985)

Sickened by the brutality of Camarena's death and exasperated by the lack of any arrests two weeks after his abduction, President Ronald Reagan angrily instructed U.S. Customs Service Commissioner William von Raab to initiate a near shutdown at the 15 ports-of-entry along the Southwest Border, painstakingly searching every single vehicle headed into the United States as a means of exerting economic pressure on the Mexican government to hunt down Camarena's murderers. Such exhaustive inspections stifled two-way commercial traffic, wait-times soaring to seven hours or more, choking off legitimate cross-border business and tourism. Operation "Stop and Seize" (also called Operation "Camarena") touched off a diplomatic furor, as Mexico City accused Washington of upending long-established border procedures as a punitive measure—to which the Reagan administration retorted that their shutdown was necessary to signal that the Mexican authorities would not be allowed to "slow-walk" or hobble any investigation.

The Guadalajara Cartel virtually collapsed under this bruising scrutiny, top members no longer being able to avoid arrests or convictions, so that factions began breaking off and rivals appropriated vulnerable drug-routes; even former military and police informants turned on them. Caro Quintero himself was apprehended in Costa Rica on April 4, 1985, providing information to his interrogators that helped locate Ernesto Fonseca two days later, ensconced with 23 heavily-armed bodyguards in a police official's home in Puerto Vallarta, being subdued by 150 soldiers and federal policemen. Many other traffickers were also swept up during this massive manhunt, such as Oaxaca Cartel leader Pedro Díaz Parada, detained while attempting to fly out of Mexico City toward Central America on April 24, 1985. The thoroughly discredited Federal Security Directorate (DFS) would be dissolved as well on November 29, 1985, and the hunt for Guadalajara Cartel fugitives would continue until their "godfather," Félix Gallardo, was captured in April 1989.

The heroic Camarena's remains had meanwhile been flown to the North Island Naval Air Station in San Diego on March 8,

1985, and he was buried with honors, being survived by his wife and children Enrique, Daniel, and Erik. During his 11 years with the DEA, he had received two Sustained Superior Performance Awards, a Special Achievement Award and—posthumously—the Administrator's Award of Honor, the highest decoration granted by the DEA.

See also: Caro Quintero, Rafael; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel; Guadalajara Cartel.

Further Reading

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Car-Bomb, Ciudad Juárez—see "Juárez Cartel: Suffering"

Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel (1967–Present). Boss of the Gulf Cartel, which grew significantly in wealth and power during his brief tenure, and who also recruited the first Zetas to serve as its paramilitary company.

Birth and Early Life (1967–1984)

Born near Matamoros, Tamaulipas, on May 18, 1967, into the family of small-time sorghum farmers Enrique Cárdenas and Manuela Guillén, Osiel was the third of five children—his other siblings being Mario, Antonio Ezequiel, Homero, and Liliana. He spent his childhood on the hardscrabble El Caracol or "The Snail" family-ranch until January 1980, when at 14 years of age he moved into his sister Liliana's home in the city. Working odd jobs, the ambitious teenager even washed the cars of Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) agents at their headquarters, as well as stocked shelves in downtown stores, washed dishes at El Mexicano Restaurant, and learned the rudiments of repairing cars at an auto shop at the intersection of Calle 14 and Morelos.

Young Osiel also remained sufficiently driven to attend night-classes toward attaining his *secundaria* or "junior high school" diploma, in a school located at the intersection of Cuarta and González Streets. Having been promoted from dishwasher to waiter at El Mexicano Restaurant, he furthermore discovered how sales of even small *pases* or "cocaine lines" on the sly among its patrons could significantly boost his income.

Introduction to Drug Trafficking (1985–1988)

Around 1985, his eldest brother, Mario, helped the 18-year-old Osiel set up his own auto-repair shop in Matamoros, which would turn out to be primarily a front for drug trafficking and a chop-shop for stolen cars. The Cárdenas brothers were all soon involved in criminal activities, Mario heading up their small enterprise, Antonio Ezequiel (the future "Tony Tormenta") in

charge of making bulk cocaine-purchases, Homero *El Orejón* or "Jug Ears" managing drug-smuggling into the United States, and Osiel handling sales in Matamoros. Despite such distractions, Osiel would complete his studies and receive his *secundaria* diploma, and at the age of 19 married Celia Salinas Aguilar, a factory worker who moved into his quarters in the auto-repair shop (and with whom he would have three children: Celia, Osiel Jr., and Grecia Cárdenas Salinas).

Early Arrests and Incarceration (1989–1995)

At 21 years of age, Osiel Cárdenas was detained by Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" (PJF) officers in Matamoros on February 16, 1989, charged with homicide, "abuse of trust," and property damage—only to be released on bail next morning, his detention having been a ruse to "shake down" a share of his auto-shop's illicit proceeds. A second similar overnight incarceration for "threats and injuries" was recorded on March 7, 1990, although he was again released next morning with merely a warning. But Cárdenas's third arrest would prove more serious, after he was caught smuggling two kilos of cocaine into Brownsville, Texas, on August 27, 1992, being apprehended as he neared the restaurant where his American buyers were waiting.

Sentenced next year to 63 months' imprisonment, he was returned to Mexico under an inmate-exchange program on January 2, 1994, to serve out his remaining time in Santa Adelaida Prison—whose director, Rolando Gómez Garza, was on his brother Mario's payroll. Osiel's 15-month stay was therefore spent learning how to insert *clavos* or "secret compartments" into cars in the prison workshop, a feature that a contemporary Los Angeles Police detective described:

> *A good indicator for a hidden compartment are pressure-plates, which are normally found on the driver's side floorboard. If a pressure-plate is present, this area may be scuffed or worn. The hidden compartments may be electronic with power coming from the lights, radio, or other power source. If a switch or pressure-plate is located, follow the wires to the source and the compartment. Other types of hidden compartments are common. Look for raised truck-beds, gas tanks with after-market welds, bed-liners, hydraulic-lift kits, fresh paint spots with weld-marks. If you are following the suspect vehicle and the vehicle makes frequent stops for fuel, this could be a good indication that the gas tank is a storage compartment.*

More importantly, Cárdenas established relationships with other incarcerated traffickers, before gaining his early release on April 13, 1995.

Rise through Trafficking Ranks (1996–1998)

Just a month short of his 28th birthday, Osiel Cárdenas emerged from Santa Adelaida a polished criminal, reassuming his position within the family's now-flourishing enterprise. Energetic and well connected, he was ideally placed to ascend the local criminal hierarchy after the unexpected arrest of the 51-year-old Gulf Cartel leader Juan García Ábrego on January 14, 1996. This boss' successor—chosen from among various claimants by García Ábrego's trusted lieutenant, Óscar Malherbe de León—was Hugo Baldomero Medina Garza, but Cárdenas and his brothers quietly threw their support behind another Gulf Cartel lieutenant, the ex-policeman Ángel Salvador "El Chava" Gómez

Herrera. Malherbe himself would be apprehended in Mexico City on February 26, 1997, while the "Lord of the Trailers" Medina Garza was badly wounded by being shot in the face during a botched abduction-attempt by "El Chava" Gómez's gunmen on April 17, 1997.

The latter thereupon laid a shaky claim to Gulf Cartel leadership, supported against his remaining challengers by Víctor Manuel "Meme el Cabezón" Vázquez Mireles and Osiel Cárdenas—the latter profiting by making various trips to Mexico City that same year of 1997 to strike his own independent deals in place of the sidelined Malherbe and Medina Garza with Gustavo Adolfo Logoño and other Colombian cocaine-suppliers. [It was rumored that Cárdenas also narrowly avoided arrest by *comandante* Arturo Pedroza Gutiérrez on July 6, 1997, through paying a substantial bribe.] "El Chava" Gómez and Cárdenas were nonetheless surprised together one year later by *Fiscalía Antidrogas* or "Anti-narcotics Prosecutorial" PGR agents at El Refugio Ranch six miles outside Matamoros on July 5, 1998, and transported to Mexico City, where a federal judge had ordered their 90-day *arraigo* or "preventive detention."

The two cartel bosses were processed and taken to a luxurious home maintained by the PGR—previously confiscated from the drug lord Héctor "El Güero" Palma—on Cráter Street in the well-to-do Pedregal de San Ángel district, but soon bribed their guards, who pretended not to hear as their charges climbed out of a window and disappeared in August 1998. [It would later be averred that Cárdenas and El Chava had paid either $60,000 or up to $750,000 in total to their four jailers, although no figure has ever been confirmed.]

Murder of "El Chava" Gómez (June–July 1999)

Growing ever richer and virtually an equal partner to "El Chava" Gómez, Cárdenas began taking the lead in eliminating pretenders to Gulf Cartel leadership. In February 1999, he asked a tough young Army special-forces deserter—Arturo Guzmán Decena—to gather about 20 gunmen and murder one such rival, Rolando "El Rolys [or Rolis]" López Salinas. Despite the failure of the ensuing assault against this competitor's fortified home, Guzmán and his fellow ex-GAFE Heriberto Lazcano acquitted themselves so well that Cárdenas retained their services.

On June 9, 1999, Cárdenas himself was accused of threatening to murder a Cameron County sheriff's deputy and his family, while this investigator was working undercover for the U.S. Customs Service out of Brownsville. Shortly thereafter, the 32-year-old drug boss traveled to his La Trementina Ranch in Tomatlán, Jalisco, accompanied by his lieutenants Jorge Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla Sánchez and "El Meme" Vázquez, as well as his bodyguard Arturo Guzmán. After a few days, Cárdenas and his party visited a luxury penthouse in Guadalajara, from where he phoned his partner, "El Chava" Gómez, who was planning an elaborate baptism in Tuxpan, Veracruz, as *padrino de bautizo* or "godfather" for the infant daughter whom Cárdenas had sired with his mistress Liliana Dávila González. Cárdenas informed El Chava that he might not be able to attend, as he was recuperating from various plastic-surgery procedures, and his colleague wished him a speedy recovery.

After returning to La Trementina, Cárdenas contacted El Chava again several days later, and they agreed to meet in late June

1999 at the small Tamaulipecan harbor of El Mezquital, the latter arriving from Tuxpan aboard one of his smuggling "fastboats." Cárdenas, meanwhile, was driven from Tomatlán in a Dodge Durango, accompanied by Vázquez Mireles and Guzmán, meeting his partner at their agreed Mezquital rendezvous. Amid effusive greetings, the prospective godfather climbed unsuspectingly into the Durango's front passenger-seat, with Guzmán sitting behind him. After a few minutes of friendly banter, Cárdenas signaled to Guzmán, who fired a bullet into the back of El Chava's head. Several of his bodyguards were killed at this same moment, while the remainder surrendered.

Vázquez Mireles thereupon suggested that El Chava's corpse be left posed with a gun in its right hand as if a suicide, in a lonely pasture near El Caracol Ranch where Cárdenas had grown up, while Cárdenas and Guzmán drove quickly back to Tomatlán to begin cementing his Gulf Cartel takeover. Vázquez Mireles tied up loose ends at the crime-scene, spreading the news of El Chava's death among local media and eliminating any potential retributions. [A few days later, for instance, people in the tiny hamlet of Lucio Blanco about a dozen miles outside Matamoros heard gunshots on the night of July 5, 1999; creeping out to investigate, they discovered a Ford Grand Marquis with the bullet-riddled bodies of four men slumped inside, all shot while blindfolded and handcuffed. These victims—one of whom had been a Tamaulipas Policía Ministerial del Estado or "Ministerial State Police" (PME) officer, another from the Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP)—were later identified as longtime Chava bodyguards.]

However, El Chava's body had still not been found after several days, so that Cárdenas instructed Vázquez Mireles to phone in an anonymous tip to the State Attorney-General's Office, and his ex-partner's decaying remains were at last located. The body had bloated and burst in the intense summer heat, and scavengers had feasted upon his carcass. In a culture where the deceased are commonly displayed in open caskets at their funerals, such mistreatment was considered callously cruel, so that Cárdenas would become despised throughout Mexico as the *Mata Amigos* or "Friend Killer."

Street Confrontation in Matamoros (November 1999)

Later that same autumn of 1999, the newly-crowned Gulf Cartel leader would be drawn into a public confrontation when American DEA agent Joe DuBois—stationed at the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, Nuevo León—and his colleague, Special Agent Daniel Fuentes from the FBI's Houston office, entered Matamoros together in a white Ford Bronco with diplomatic plates to gather firsthand intelligence on the Gulf Cartel on the afternoon of November 9, 1999, driving around accompanied by a local crime-beat reporter named Raúl Bermúdez, to identify a number of properties, stash houses, and warehouses.

At first, they were tailed by a Dodge Ram pickup, but soon lost it on the main road. Then, as the investigators resumed their tour and drove past Cárdenas' large pink mansion with its high walls and security cameras, they were spotted again and within moments a Lincoln Continental began following them, as well as a pickup with Texas plates. Fuentes phoned the commander of Matamoros' municipal police

and asked him to send help, but that officer hedged, so the FBI agent could only ask him to keep the line open. The U.S. agents and their informant were eventually cornered on Sexta Street (not far from police headquarters) by at least three vehicles, one of which was being driven by a state police officer known to have defected to the cartel. The Bronco was stopped and surrounded by more than a dozen men pointing assault-rifles, some dressed in police uniforms and led by Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla and Rogelio "El Kelín" or "El Quelín" González Pizaña, while other nearby officers redirected traffic.

The cartel gunmen demanded that the informant be handed over, and when this was refused, Cárdenas himself arrived in a white Jeep Cherokee—a Colt pistol with a gold grip thrust into his waistband, plus waving around a gold-plated AK-47—and pounded on the hood to insist that the "*gringos*" hand over their passenger. After 20 minutes of tense arguments, the American agents were allowed to escape back over the border with their contact, shaken by this naked display of criminal power. Cárdenas, apparently worried about a possible reaction from the U.S. government, hid out for a spell at his lawyer Juan Jesús Guerrero Chapa's private ranch in Nuevo León. The only immediate consequence turned out to be that a federal grand jury in Brownsville returned a sealed indictment on March 14, 2000, charging Cárdenas and his associates Juan Manuel Garza Rendón and Adán "El Licenciado" Medrano Rodríguez with a variety of offenses, after which a $2 million reward was offered for their arrest and conviction.

Wealth and Power (2000–2001)

Cárdenas's income would continue to soar from the consignments of Colombian cocaine regularly arriving at his four clandestine airstrips:

- Punto Zacatal, south of Matamoros, near his childhood home of El Caracol;
- another along lengthy Sendero Nacional Avenue, in the municipality of Valle Hermoso;
- a third at his Las Amarillas Ranch outside the village of China, seven miles southeast of General Bravo in neighboring Nuevo León; and
- Los Cuervos airfield, about 15 miles east of Matamoros near the Big and Dry Dams between Las Américas Avenue and lonely Bagdad Beach, managed by his subordinate "El Kelín" González Pizaña [*Señor de la Playa* or "Lord of the Beach"], where cargoes could be swiftly offloaded under cover of darkness and transferred aboard "fast-boats" to be run into the United States.

The Mexican magazine *Proceso* would furthermore describe how Cárdenas's earnings not only derived from drugs—while acknowledging that he was "responsible for thirty percent of the cocaine sold in the United States market"—but also through:

- extorting *derecho de piso* fees from lesser traffickers at every significant border-crossing in Tamaulipas (Matamoros, Reynosa, Díaz Ordaz, Camargo, Miguel Alemán, Ciudad Mier, etc.);
- smuggling in high-powered American weapons to sell as banned firearms, plus commercial products unavailable in Mexico as contraband items on the black market;
- granting permissions to independent operators to run houses of prostitution and drug dens, as well as for jewelers to

deal in precious stones, plus cross-border auto-theft rings;
- and even city ambulance services and lowly *polleros* who guided undocumented aliens through the desert into the United States.

All had to pay a corresponding stipend to the Gulf Cartel boss, or risk being painfully put out of business.

According to file-number PGR/SIEDO/UEIDSC/001/2003, Angélica Lagunas Jaramillo—Arturo Guzmán's future mother-in-law—first met Osiel Cárdenas when he visited her store on August 16, 2001, to demand that she pay a *derecho de piso* fee in order to remain in business. She recalled that the Gulf Cartel boss was accompanied by Heriberto Lazcano and various other Zeta gunmen, whose job was to:

> *. . . search for those who sold contraband wines and liquors, as well as Calle Diez prostitutes, who had to pay their* derecho de piso. *Additionally, they were in charge of guarding the beaches to prevent the arrival of boats bearing undocumented aliens, drugs, or contraband merchandise, without paying their* derecho de piso.

Cárdenas threatened her with death if Lagunas did not agree to use her name in buying safe-houses for his cartel, for which she would be paid $100 for each transaction, as well as being exempted from any *derecho de piso* tax on her store.

Creation of Los Zetas (October 2000–January 2002)

The month after a second assassination-attempt against "El Rolys" López had failed on September 22, 2000, and this rival was reinforced by Sinaloan gunmen, Cárdenas instructed his trusted young bodyguard Arturo Guzmán to raise an entire paramilitary company from Army deserters. Although the charismatic 25-year-old former special-forces commando recruited a few-dozen more men who would become known as the Zetas, it was Cárdenas who would insist upon proper discipline, with professional training and instruction in the latest firearms, as well as the acquisition of high-end weaponry and the best intelligence-gathering equipment money could buy.

By early 2002, the national magazine *Proceso* was receiving multiple reports from alarmed civilians about long, military-style columns of identical black pickups roaring down highways in Tamaulipas, manned by 50 or more heavily-armed gunmen wearing matching black uniforms complete with helmets, balaclavas, bullet-proof vests, and combat boots—appearing to all the world like Army patrols, except for the white "Z" stenciled on their door panels. [For greater detail on Cárdenas' input into their creation, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003): Coalescence, Enhanced Training, etc."]

Conquest of Nuevo Laredo (February–December 2002)

In February 2002, Cárdenas—having paid the requisite *derecho de piso* or "transit fee" to José Dionisio "El Chacho" Román García, one of two gang-leaders controlling Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, to smuggle two tons of cocaine through that border-city into Texas—dispatched his consignment with a Zeta escort. However, upon passing through Nuevo Laredo, his convoy was intercepted and its cargo almost seized. Infuriated by El Chacho's double-dealing, Cárdenas ordered his Zetas to infiltrate and mount a surprise retaliatory-strike next month within Román García's own stronghold. The latter's 300 street-thugs would prove no match for the

sophisticated intelligence-gathering, firepower, tactics, and ruthlessness of Cárdenas's 50–60 Zetas and were soon routed, "El Chacho" himself being abducted from his Monterrey home on May 13, 2002, and tortured to death. [For greater details, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003): Battle for Nuevo Laredo."]

Despite efforts by the Milenio, Juárez, and Sinaloa Cartels to regain their former access through Nuevo Laredo, Cárdenas' Zetas proved too formidable to be defeated, despite the death of their operational leader Arturo Guzmán in Matamoros on November 21, 2002. The Gulf Cartel was now profiting doubly from *derechos de piso* and selling its own narcotics at this newly acquired border-crossing, when its 35-year-old leader was abruptly apprehended.

Unexpected Capture (March 2003)

With President Fox's personal clearance, 100 GAFE special-forces and 50 AFI agents—supported by a helicopter hovering in the distance—arrived at 9:20 a.m. on March 14, 2003, outside Cárdenas' Punta Estrella safe-house at 84 Virgo Street, near the intersection of Leo Street with Avenida del Niño in Matamoros' Fraccionamiento Infonavit-Satélite. Half an hour later, the soldiers stormed his residence, taking the drug lord and his 20 bodyguards (including numerous Zetas) completely by surprise. His *sicarios* nonetheless mounted sufficient resistance to allow Cárdenas to jump over the backyard fence and attempt to flee on foot, although he was quickly cornered and subdued.

Upon removing him as a prisoner shortly thereafter, Cárdenas's captors were fired upon again at long range by the stubborn Zeta bodyguards, who had been reinforced, resulting in three soldiers wounded. A third rescue-attempt was made by the Zetas as the captive was being sped in a van toward Matamoros' Servando Canales International Airport, only to be beaten off by a force of Policías Federales Preventivas or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) who had joined the captors, so that Cárdenas was at last bundled aboard a Mexican Air Force plane and flown away to the Santa Lucía Air Base outside Mexico City, and from there conveyed by helicopter to the Campo Militar Número Uno, to be handed over to UEDO for interrogation.

Simultaneously, a large Sinaloa Cartel hit-squad sent by "El Chapo" Guzmán had also attacked the residence of Osiel's 41-year-old younger brother and second-in-command, Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas in Los Arcos Township, Nuevo León, briefly capturing him before being annihilated by a Zeta counterattack supported by an armored vehicle. Acting upon Osiel Cárdenas' revelations, the authorities would subsequently launch Operación "Corsario," a campaign intended to round up as many Gulf Cartel members as possible.

Detention in Mexico and the United States (2003–Present)

His cartel's operations were not adversely affected by Osiel Cárdenas's removal, day-to-day management being temporarily assumed by "Tony Tormenta" and "El Coss" Costilla, while the incarcerated drug-lord was soon able to apply his immense wealth toward running his business from inside "La Palma" or Altiplano Penitentiary, by using dozens of Nextel cell-phones and daily visits from his lawyers to convey his directives—including assassinations executed by his loyal Zetas. [For greater details, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003): Wider-Ranging Strikes" and "Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009): Long-Range

Hit-Teams."] He would prove a difficult prisoner, disrupting that institution through excessive bribes, alienating other convicted drug-bosses, and roiling its inmate population, until Osiel Cárdenas was finally extradited to the United States on January 19, 2007, along with the brothers Ismael and Gilberto Higuera Guerrero, former chiefs in the Arellano-Felix cartel in Tijuana and Mexicali; Héctor "El Güero" Palma Salazar; and ten other major traffickers.

See also: Gulf Cartel; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003); Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009).

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Cardinal Posadas Murder (1993).

Errant assassination, when this prelate's car was mistaken for that of the Sinaloa Cartel leader, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán.

In the early afternoon of May 24, 1993, 66-year-old Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, bishop of Guadalajara, took his chauffeur-driven white Ford Grand Marquis to that city's busy Libertador Miguel Hidalgo International Airport to personally greet the arriving papal *nuncio* Monsignor Girolamo Prigione. Inching through its congested pickup-zone by 3:30 p.m., the cardinal did not even see the four Arellano Cartel gunmen who suddenly ran up behind either side of his car and fired off 140 rounds at close range—14 of which struck him, killing him instantly along with his chauffeur and five innocent bystanders. The murderers then disappeared into the panicky throngs, leaving behind assorted assault-rifles, fragmentation grenades, pistols, and hundreds of ammunition-rounds in their abandoned vehicle. All of Mexico and the world were horrified by this inexplicable, vicious attack on a highly-regarded church figure.

However, Mexican Army and U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency officers quickly identified the source of this murder as the clandestine underworld war raging between the Tijuana and Sinaloa Cartels, which had recently surged in violence and produced dozens of deaths. Specifically, Ramón Arellano Félix—the Tijuana Cartel's ferocious security-chief, who had narrowly escaped an attempt on his own life six months earlier—had spent the preceding six days prowling Guadalajara with a 12-man hit squad, hoping to ambush his hated antagonist "El Chapo" Guzmán, learning that he was being chauffeured in a late-model white Ford Grand Marquis. [For greater detail on this Tijuana-Sinaloa conflict, see "Arellano-Félix Organization: Clandestine Warfare and Fatal Blunder."]

Having failed to catch sight of their quarry, a disappointed Arellano and his hitmen were intending to fly back to Tijuana that same afternoon, but while forging through airport traffic in three vehicles, one carful of assassins unexpectedly spotted "El Chapo" in a chauffeur-driven, green armored Buick, escorted by a half-dozen bodyguards on his way to catch an

Aeroméxico flight to Puerto Vallarta. These first surprised Tijuana gunmen alerted their colleagues and all broke out their weaponry to go in pursuit, but it would be a second car of assassins who actually regained contact—only to mistakenly close in on the wrong vehicle, the chauffeur-driven white Ford Grand Marquis which lamentably contained not Guzmán, but the cardinal.

Next day, May 25, 1993, an infuriated Mexican government broadcast a nationwide reward of 15 million new pesos—equivalent to about $5 million—for information leading to the arrest of the main protagonists behind this ugly affair: Ramón, Francisco Javier, and Benjamín Arellano of the Tijuana Cartel, plus "El Güero" Palma and "El Chapo" Guzmán from the Sinaloa Cartel. All immediately went underground, while Arellano family representatives laid out millions of dollars in bribes to plead their brothers' innocence before President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, to no avail. Multiple manhunts continued, searching aggressively for the fugitives, while rival cartels and gangs took advantage of the Arellanos' tactical weakness.

"El Chapo" Guzmán was captured in Guatemala and presented to Mexican authorities on June 9, 1993, eventually being sentenced to 20 years and nine months' incarceration for possession of firearms, drug trafficking, criminal association, bribery, and complicity in Cardinal Posadas's murder—although this latter charge would subsequently be dismissed. One week later, an arrest-warrant was issued in Mexico City on June 16, 1993, for Ramón Arellano on drug and arms violations, but he would prove impossible to find. The Federal Judicial Police in Tijuana therefore arrested his older, uninvolved brother, Francisco Rafael Arellano, on December 4, 1993, who would be sentenced to ten years and three months' imprisonment for drug trafficking, illegal possession of firearms, and complicity in the Posadas murder. And despite not being a crime committed within United States jurisdiction, the American government also charged nine members of the Logan Heights gang for involvement in this foul murder, three ultimately pleading guilty and receiving sentences of 18 to 22 years apiece.

See also: Arellano-Félix Organization; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo."

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Caro Quintero, Rafael

(1952–Present). Early drug billionaire, whose immense fortune would be lost through his malevolent role in the murder of American undercover DEA agent Enrique Camarena.

Birth and Impoverished Childhood (1952–1969)

He was born on October 3, 1952, on a ranch named La Noria in the mountainous municipality of Badiraguato, Sinaloa [not far from where Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán would also be born a few years later, whom Caro Quintero would know as a boy]. He was the eldest son among the 11 children born to Emilio Caro Payán and Hermelinda

Quintero, peasants eking out a modest living by farming and breeding a few head of cattle on their small parcel of rented land. His father died when Rafael was 13, so that he left school with only a sixth-grade education to try to support his family. Three years of poverty ensued while he struggled to produce a few small yields of corn, beans, and wheat, ending when the 16-year-old Rafael traveled to Caborca, Sonora—a desert town not too far from the border with Nogales, Arizona—to find better-paying work on a cattle ranch.

Desperate for money, Caro Quintero probably had his first contacts with the drug trade in that remote town, and by the age of 18 had become a truck driver—a useful occupation for the purchase and transportation of bulk cargoes of marijuana into the smuggling-port of Culiacán. It is also believed that around this same time, he befriended small-time traffickers Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Juan José Esparragoza Moreno, who—like him—hailed from the municipality of Badiraguato.

Early Successes (1970–1976)

Shortly thereafter, with demand for narcotics booming throughout California and the American Southwest, the youthful Caro Quintero departed Culiacán into neighboring Chihuahua to try growing his own marijuana crops on a small hardscrabble ranch named La Ciénega, owned by his younger brother Jorge Luis along a sparsely-populated stretch of the Sonoran border, far from prying eyes. The business of growing marijuana or purchasing small harvests from poor farmers, then trucking these yields into Culiacán to be smuggled up the Pacific coast into the United States, proved relatively easy and remunerative. Older family members were already involved in the traffic, such as Caro Quintero's cousins Lamberto Quintero and Francisco Javier Quintero Payán, plus uncles like Emilio and Juan José Quintero Payán, so that through them he came to be introduced to Pedro Avilés Pérez—the regional crime-boss, as well as an uncle of "El Chapo" Guzmán.

It was Avilés who taught Caro Quintero the rudiments of marijuana cultivation, which he gradually mastered (although years later, Ernesto Fonseca would recall how Caro Quintero had initially tried to sell him about 300 kilos of "dry and bad-quality" marijuana). Yet through concentrating on perfecting his agricultural methods, while leaving smuggling to others, Caro Quintero's output improved quickly in quality and his volumes soon soared into 20-ton consignments. By the late 1970s, he was rich enough to return to Caborca and pass himself off as a successful cattle-broker, licensed to export cows into the United States—a convenient cover for his drug shipments. Among the many showy acquisitions purchased by this *nouveau riche* young trafficker would be a historic, sprawling hacienda named "Castillo El Álamo," situated between the hamlets of Magdalena and Tubutama about 20 miles outside Caborca, which he would eventually have restored—allegedly at a cost of $4 million.

Retreat into Guadalajara (1977–1979)

Cross-border bulk shipments of marijuana eventually began drawing Washington's attention, so that shortly after the inauguration of Mexico's next president, José López Portillo, on December 1, 1976, it was announced that an expanded drug-eradication campaign code-named Operation "Condor" was to be implemented. Designed to destroy thousands of small clandestine marijuana and poppy fields through aerial spraying with herbicides, plus overland Army sweeps, this operation

began on January 16, 1977, with the deployment out of Culiacán of 5,000 troops and two-dozen helicopters, plus 350 federal policemen under corrupt *comandante* Carlos Aguilar Garza from the Procuraduría General de la República or "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR). Its first results seemed promising, many minor arrests being made and illegal plots destroyed over the next few months, so that drug exports fell off significantly, violent shootouts erupting around Culiacán as feuding traffickers fought over the dwindling supplies and evaporating profits out of the United States.

However, top *narco* bosses such as Caro Quintero remained relatively unaffected, because of the hefty bribes which they regularly paid police, military, DFS, and PRI officials, so that they weathered this storm while many of their smaller or less capable competitors went under. Nevertheless, given the uncertainties of this period, many drug lords began relocating their private homes into Mexico's second-largest city—Guadalajara [1970 population: 1.2 million]—buying up splendid villas and enjoying the luxuries of life in that beautiful city, far from the dangers of arrest or gunplay around their grow-operations, which they continued to manage from afar.

This exodus into Jalisco's capital—which contemporaries derisively nicknamed the *efecto cucaracha* or "cockroach effect," similar to the scurry of a swarm of these insects into hiding once a few have been exposed to light—accelerated after the legendary trafficker Pedro Avilés Pérez was intercepted and executed by soldiers on Culiacán's outskirts on September 15, 1978. The killing of such a wily, veteran figure fanned greater concern among the other bosses, so that most had relocated their families into Guadalajara by the end of that same year, and would soon begin cooperating to found Mexico's first cartel. Ironically, Washington lost interest in its Mexican eradication-efforts around this same time, instead becoming more preoccupied with the tons of potent Colombian cocaine flowing through the Caribbean into Florida from Medellín, so that Mexican marijuana and heroin production consequently resurged as of 1979.

Marijuana Agro-Business (1980–1984)

Drug entrepreneurs also grew more ambitious, forsaking the purchase of myriad crops from small family farms, in favor of establishing their own enormous modern plantations to harvest ever-bigger and more refined payloads. One of the boldest innovators was Caro Quintero, who through buying up thousands of acres of barren, semidesert land in northern Chihuahua and converting these into huge marijuana-grows extending as far north as Sonoíta, as far east as El Arenoso, as far south as the municipalities of Altar and Pitiquito, and throughout the Valley of Caborca, had reputedly acquired a personal fortune of half a billion dollars by the time that he turned 29. It was noted in 1981 that he was making extraordinary payoffs to police commanders, regional politicians, senior military officers—and above all to the villainous Miguel Nazar Haro (infamous for his role in the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre and his "White Brigade" death squad during the subsequent "Dirty War"), who had been appointed DFS chief as of 1978.

Caro Quintero broadened his operations by inviting two-dozen Guadalajara Cartel associates—big, medium, and small operators—to pool their resources and join him in financing the cultivation of thousands more acres of *sinsemilla* marijuana-plantations throughout Zacatecas, Durango, and Chihuahua. Tens of millions of pesos

allowed his consortium to bribe local police; purchase numerous farms; outfit scores of guards with heavy weaponry, patrol vehicles, and radios; hire trained agronomists to properly plant, nurture, and harvest crops; employ professional contractors to dig deep wells for water, plus dams for controlled irrigation; pay electrical engineers to install power-grids and electric pump systems; and acquire high-grade fertilizer by the ton, along with the latest farm machinery—all to ensure the highest yields possible, with finished product being stored in dry, custom-built underground silos until shipped out on tractor-trailers. Caro Quintero's agro-business plan even called for planting three different grades of marijuana, one dubbed *limón verde* or "lime green" (a hybrid strain from Oaxaca renowned for its potency, despite being pressed and sun-dried during refinement); *cola de zorra* or "she-fox's tail" from Sinaloa; and *China*. He was proud of his vast landholdings, and it would later be reported that Caro Quintero often sped past on visits, usually in a convoy of three or four new Grand Marquis luxury cars taken from his Ford dealership in Guadalajara.

Loss of the Fresnillo Grow-Operation and Hunt for the DEA Operative (May 1984)

Yet the drawbacks associated with large-scale marijuana cultivation, compared with trafficking in compact high-value cocaine, were that:

- its bright-green foliage was easy to spot from the air in such arid landscapes, while
- the harvesting, refinement, and storage of such voluminous crops was also becoming increasingly difficult to conceal from Army patrols on the ground; plus
- the smuggling of bulky, redolent cargoes past U.S. customs agents with sniffer-dogs was growing progressively harder; and
- all of this labor-intensive work was rewarded with only relatively low profit-margins.

Thanks to an investigation by energetic American DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Salazar, one of Caro Quintero's sprawling new grow-operations was destroyed outside Fresnillo, Zacatecas, when soldiers plus scores of Judicial Police and DFS agents under *comandante* Miguel Aldana Ibarra disgorged in strength on May 28, 1984, making a wide sweep that netted 20 tons of refined marijuana, three tons of marijuana seeds, 200 liters of hashish oil, and 117 low-level employees. Stung by this loss, Caro Quintero demanded to know from his paid police informers which agent had been responsible for this intelligence coup, although he and his Guadalajara Cartel investors continued to establish more large plantations throughout the desert states of Sonora, Baja California, and Chihuahua. But more seizures followed that same summer of 1984, as Caro Quintero's anger grew.

At a gathering held immediately after the baptism in Guadalajara of Javier Barba Hernández's daughter Joremi in September 1984, Caro Quintero met in the home of the well-connected politician Rubén Zuno Arce (a brother-in-law of Mexico's previous president, Luis Echeverría) with his senior partners Fonseca Carrillo and Félix Gallardo; the former Federal Judicial Police Director Manuel Ibarra Herrera; and the recent head of the Interpol office in Mexico City, Miguel Aldana Ibarra—who had led the raid against the Fresnillo grow-operation in late

May 1984. Complaining about their string of setbacks, the cartel members demanded that the unknown DEA agent be unmasked and *levantado* or "picked up"—that is, abducted. As a further token of their displeasure, a Mexican informant working for the DEA's Guadalajara office was shot to death on September 30, 1984; then a car slid past the residence of another DEA agent, Roger Knapp, on the morning of October 10, 1984, firing a 30-round clip into his parked car outside. Because of this unmistakable threat, Knapp and his family would be recalled to Texas shortly thereafter.

At another similar meeting held prior to the wedding of Barba Hernandez's brother Jorge at his sprawling "La Quinta" home in the suburb of Tonalá in October 1984, the cartel's former Honduran contact Juan Ramón Matta Ballasteros was shown various police-files by Aldana, seeking leads on the agent behind the marijuana seizure at Zacatecas, adding "that something would have to be done about him." After the wedding, a second larger group—now including Caro Quintero and Fonseca Carrillo—suggested that the DEA agent be "picked up" as soon as his identity was discovered, and brought in for a "face-to-face meeting" so as to find out how much he knew and who had been collaborating with him.

Disaster at El Búfalo and Unmasking of the DEA Agent (November 1984–January 1985)

Then a second, much more expensive loss occurred when the 2,500-acre grow-operation radiating out around the tiny hamlet of Búfalo, 20 miles from Ciudad Jiménez in the municipality of Valle de Allende in the southern part of Chihuahua, was taken by surprise. [Although often referred to as "Rancho El Búfalo," there is actually no town of that name—just an unnamed ranch on the outskirts of Búfalo, Chihuahua.] On the morning of November 9, 1984, a contingent from the ongoing Operación "Pacífico" campaign—270 soldiers of the 35th Infantry Battalion aboard a column of trucks, 170 agents of the recently-expanded Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" under *comandante* Elías Ramírez, 35 agents of the Federal Attorney-General's Ministerio Público or "Public Ministry" under *comandante* Antonio Quezada Fornelli, plus 50 other assorted agents, supported by 15 helicopters and three light planes—descended and fanned out for miles into its surrounding district. They uncovered large fields tended by at least 11,000 peasants under conditions of virtual slavery, extending as far as the Rancho El Reliz near Ciudad Jiménez and Rancho de Chilicote [one of these distant subsidiaries being run by a 27-year-old Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán, his first major managerial job for the Guadalajara Cartel].

Prisoners were at first housed in Parral's jail, then taken on to Chihuahua City, while approximately 8,500 tons of high-quality seedless marijuana being dried in 25 football-field-size sheds and 2,500 tons of warehoused seeds were destroyed, with an estimated street-value of $2.5 billion—the entire complex's yearly output being valued at $8 billion, enough to supply the entire U.S. market. Caro Quintero was in Badiraguato when he learned of this staggering loss for himself and his cartel coinvestors, furiously contacting his Honduran colleague Matta Ballasteros to find out why "the Army knew so much about this ranch and how its money was moved."

Caro Quintero vented his anger over this crippling loss with DFS *comandante* Tomás Morlette Bórquez in Guadalajara's "La Langosta" restaurant on January 23, 1985, but

the cartel leadership held another meeting only a few days afterward in Ernesto Fonseca's "La Bajadita" home on Hidalgo Street in Colinas de San Javier, beside the Medical School of the Guadalajara Autonomous University—at which it was announced that the unknown DEA agent had at last been identified. A photograph of Camarena standing arm-in-arm with a local restaurant-owner named Antonio Padilla de la Mora was passed around among the assembled partners, who besides Caro Quintero included Félix Gallardo and Manuel "El Cochiloco" Salcido Uzeta. [Another snapshot of Camarena, apparently taken in the Federal Judicial Police headquarters in Guadalajara, would later be found in Félix Gallardo's home.] Fonseca Carrillo asked for permission to have Padilla killed, but the rest demurred because this restaurant owner was working for El Cochiloco. However, Caro Quintero grabbed the photo of Camarena—whom he knew—and allegedly growled: "This son of a whore is going to die."

Abduction and Murder (February 7–9, 1985)

The 37-year-old DEA agent was snatched off the street shortly after leaving the U.S. Consulate in downtown Guadalajara around midday on February 7, 1985, by five Jalisco State Police agents in a pair of vehicles. When he hesitated, they pushed him inside a car at gunpoint and threw a jacket over his head, beating him with pipes as they sped away. At almost the same time, Camarena's pilot collaborator, Alfredo Zavala, was seized while leaving Guadalajara's airport. Both captives were driven to one of Caro Quintero's many Guadalajara properties: a large, secluded, two-story residence with a swimming pool, covered patio, aviary, and tennis court surrounded by a wall at 881 Lope de Vega Street, near the corner of Sol Street in Colonia Jardines del Bosque.

The drug boss welcomed their arrival gleefully and ordered the prisoners taken to a small guesthouse at the property's rear for interrogation. The original intent seems to have been to extract from them how much the Americans knew about their cartel operations and partnerships with state and federal officials, without any consideration being given toward this abduction's eventual outcome. Some junior cartel-partners were at first allowed to pose questions to the frightened captives, and a drunken Ernesto Fonseca dropped by for a visit—and upon being informed by Caro Quintero about the DEA agent's capture said that he felt ill from too many lemon-spirited tequilas that had triggered his citrus allergy, so needed to sleep and would question Camarena upon awakening. But even then Fonseca did not feel well, so he instead went home.

Free to vent the full fury of his wrath and high on cocaine, Caro Quintero had Camarena tortured with increasing savagery throughout that entire afternoon and evening (Zavala having succumbed early on). An unknown officer suspected to have been ex-Federal *comandante* Sergio Espino Verdín subjected the DEA agent to an unrelenting barrage of questions, taping his replies through shrieks of pain and peppered with insults; beatings with fists, sticks, and pipes; burning with electrical coils; ice-pick jabs; etc. Several times during this horrific ordeal, Camarena passed out, only to be revived by shots administered by Dr. Humberto Machain. [For greater details on this abduction and torment, see "Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki": Abduction, Torture, and Murder."]

When a recuperated Fonseca returned on the morning of February 8, 1985, he found Camarena barely conscious and near

death. Aghast at the inevitable consequences of such sadistic mistreatment of an American agent, Fonseca angrily reprimanded Caro Quintero and raised his hand as if to slap him—prompting Caro's henchmen to aim their weapons and Fonseca's to do the same, until the older man stomped out of the house. Meanwhile, Camarena's DEA colleagues had begun searching for the whereabouts of their missing men, without success. Camarena was finally killed when a tire iron was smashed into his skull early on February 9, 1985, and a now-sober Caro Quintero left for the airport while both bodies were being dismembered and stuffed into plastic bags, to be driven out to the huge Primavera Park forest outside Guadalajara and buried in an unmarked pit.

Brazen Getaway (February 9, 1985)

As Caro Quintero was preparing to fly out of Guadalajara's Miguel Hidalgo Airport that same morning of February 9, 1985, a contingent of Federal Judicial Policemen under *comandante* Armando Pavón Reyes (which had been hastily recalled from patrol duties in Colima) arrived along with some American DEA observers. They approached two-dozen men armed with AK-47s guarding a private Dassault-Falcon 200 business jet readying for takeoff, and after a brief standoff with this unknown security-detail—who identified themselves as DFS agents—Pavón met with the passenger, a tall mustachioed man with thick curly hair, wearing black cowboy gear and a lot of gold. He flashed the *comandante* a badge and both men walked around the jet talking, while the man in black occasionally glanced back to smile at the DEA agents, who looked on incredulously.

Pavón then shook hands with the man in black, and several of his policemen also walked over to greet this individual. When questioned by the U.S. agents, the *comandante* told them that the passenger had identified himself with a DFS badge as an agent named "Pedro Sánchez Parra," although it was actually Caro Quintero. As his jet began taxing out toward the runway, he reappeared at its open door and waved an AK-47 at the *federales* and DEA officers, shouting: "Next time, my children, bring better weapons, not toys!" Caro Quintero thereupon took a swig from a champagne bottle and went back inside, closing the door. He had promised *comandante* Pavón 60 million pesos to be allowed to fly away toward Culiacán, where he picked up his teenage girlfriend, Sara Cosío Martínez (niece of a prominent Jalisco PRI politician), before proceeding on to Caborca to lie low on his huge El Castillo ranch.

Flight to Costa Rica and Apprehension (March–April 1985)

But Caro Quintero's taunting escape only further inflamed the wrath spreading in American circles about Camarena's abduction, so that the Mexican government came under mounting pressure to intensify its efforts toward locating the missing DEA agent and bringing his attackers to justice. Unfamiliar military and police units, whose commanders were unknown to Guadalajara Cartel bosses and thus unsusceptible to bribes, began flooding into Jalisco to set up dragnets and make mass-arrests, while the authorities' intelligence-gathering became much more effective as well. Concerned by this manhunt's escalating scope, Caro Quintero slipped away from Caborca by car to hide out in remote Guasave, Sinaloa, and his anxiety peaked after Camarena's dismembered body was discovered on March 5, 1985—igniting a furious reaction from the U.S. government.

Now desperately seeking a safe haven outside Mexico, Caro Quintero dispatched his fixer, Jesús "Cachas" Félix Gutiérrez, to Costa Rica, where he purchased four homes and two luxury cars on behalf of his boss. After reporting back to Caro Quintero, Félix Gutiérrez returned to San José's Juan Santamaría International Airport at dawn on Sunday, March 17, 1985, his private plane being met during its five-minute layover by Colonel Luis Barrantes—the accommodating chief of the Antinarcotics Office of Costa Rica's Ministerio de Justicia de la República or "Justice Ministry for the Republic." Caro Quintero and a half-dozen companions followed aboard a second private plane at 5:00 that same Sunday afternoon, having taken off from a clandestine airstrip near Mazatlán to be likewise met by Colonel Barrantes and Antonio Pereira Sevilla, the airport's director of immigration. Although the flight plan had listed its destination as David, Panama, the pilot claimed to be running low on fuel, so that this second plane with heavily-tinted windows was allowed to land and taxi off to a distant hangar and discharge its passengers, without any scrutiny from customs agents.

Shortly thereafter, Caro Quintero's principal money-launderers and financial managers in Guadalajara—brothers Eduardo and Javier Cordero Stauffer, who additionally ran at least 300 legitimate firms throughout Jalisco on his behalf—were picked up among the many suspects snared by government dragnets, and soon revealed that Caro Quintero had already flown away to Costa Rica. They even added the information that he had taken up residence in his recently-purchased villa named Finca "La California" in San Rafael de Ojo de Agua, in the province of Alajuela only ten miles outside Costa Rica's national capital, and scarcely two miles from San José's international airport. [His other properties bought by Félix Gutiérrez being in Vásquez de Coronado, in Bello Horizonte de Escazú, and a third in San José de la Montaña, all four homes having cost a total of about $2 million.]

The fugitive was arrested along with his companions at La California in San Rafael de Ojo de Agua at 5:45 a.m. on Thursday, April 4, 1985, by a ten-man SWAT team from Costa Rica's Unidad Especial de Intervención or "Special Intervention Unit" (UEI), plus 15 drug agents from the Sección de Estupefacientes del Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ).

Incarceration (1985–2013)

Extradited to Mexico next day—April 5, 1985—Caro Quintero was soon being interrogated under the supervision of Florentino Ventura, chief of the Federal Judicial Police's Narcotics Division, to whom he provided much useful intelligence. Based upon his revelations, the authorities were able to locate the drug boss's 60-year-old colleague, Ernesto Fonseca, two days later, ensconced with 23 heavily-armed bodyguards at a police official's home in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. After a brief siege by 150 soldiers and federal policemen, Fonseca surrendered on Monday, April 8, 1985, while Caro Quintero continued to provide valuable information on dozens of other traffickers, plus senior Army, state, and Federal Police collaborators.

Although incarcerated, the 32-year-old Caro Quintero nonetheless remained an immensely wealthy man, with approximately 1,000 *sicarios* still under his command and countless corrupt officials on his payrolls. Government prosecutors tasked with disentangling and expropriating his vast financial empire would later estimate his total worth at around 100 billion pesos,

including at least 38 large mansions in Jalisco, Zacatecas, Sinaloa, and Sonora, plus more than 300 legitimate businesses such as luxury hotels, restaurants, automobile agencies, discothèques, boutiques, etc. It was said that for his first birthday in prison (October 3, 1985), Caro Quintero hired two bands to play continuously for 12 hours during the festivities inside the penitentiary.

After 24 years of courtroom litigation, Caro Quintero was finally found guilty by Judge Adalberto Maldonado Trenado of Jalisco's Fourth District Court for Camarena's and Zavala's murders on June 3, 2009, as well as numerous other killings, plus compelling at least 4,000 peasants to work as forced laborers on his Chihuahua grow-operation. His sentence was supposed to be for 199 years, with another 150 for his ex-partner, Ernesto "Don Neto" Fonseca, but only 40-year sentences could be imposed according to Article 25 of the Código Penal Federal or "Federal Penal Code."

Unforeseen Parole (August 2013)

At dawn on August 9, 2013, Caro Quintero walked out of the main entrance of Puente Grande maximum-security prison, accompanied by his legal team. An appeals judge from Jalisco's Primer Tribunal Colegiado en Materia Penal del Tercer Circuito had ruled that his original trial before a federal court for the abduction, torture, and murder of the DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena was a violation of due-process because the deceased had not been a diplomat or otherwise internationally-protected person, so that Caro Quintero should have been tried in a state rather than federal court. This decision would in turn be appealed and reversed, so that Caro Quintero was once more found guilty in a federal court of Camarena's murder and a new warrant was issued for his re-arrest on January 16, 2015, although he had already disappeared and it would prove impossible to enforce.

On June 13, 2015, the U.S. Treasury Department reported that four 12-story white luxury condominiums, known as the Reserva-Zotogrande complex in the western section of Zapopan, Jalisco, were still owned by the Caro family's Fracsa construction company—although no such firm could be found at its listed address of Avenida Vallarta 3060. Also, two of the four legitimate sons whom Caro Quintero had sired with his wife, María Elizabeth Elenes Lerma—their eldest Héctor Rafael Caro Elenes, a world-class equestrian rider who had participated in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and Henoch Emilio—owned three large natural-gas businesses: Desarrollos Bio Gas, Petrobios, and Eca Energéticos, as well as a gasoline station located at Adolfo B. Horn 1437 in Toluquilla, Tlaquepaque, Jalisco.

See also: Badiraguato; Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki"; "Condor", Operation; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo."

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Carrillo Fuentes, Amado

(1956–1997). Juárez Cartel leader and one of Mexico's earliest drug billionaires, famous for using aircraft to fly in Colombian cocaine by the ton for trans-shipment into the United States, and today remembered as the *Señor de los Cielos* or "Lord of the Skies."

Birth and Early Struggles (1956–1979)

Amado Carrillo had been born on December 17, 1956, to poor peasants named Walter Vicente Carrillo Vega and Aurora Fuentes Aguirre, in a tiny rural canyon named Cañada el Guamuchilito in the sprawling coastal municipality of Navolato in the northwestern state of Sinaloa, about 25 miles west of Culiacán. He was the second child and first boy of what would eventually be six sons named Amado, Cipriano, Vicente, José Cruz, Alberto, and Rodolfo, plus sisters María Luisa, Berthila, Flor, Alicia, and Aurora. Their uncle was Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo of Badiraguato, a local trafficker who would later rise to become a founder of the Guadalajara Cartel.

Amado received a rudimentary primary-school education but soon had to quit and seek employment, the family's circumstances being so desperate that his younger brother Cipriano (along with dozens of other poor local farmers) signed up to receive a slender portion of *ejido* or "communal land" from the government to plant crops on April 10, 1975. Amado, meanwhile, got his start into the drug business under the tutelage of his uncle Ernesto Fonseca, first learning how to plant, cultivate, harvest, and ship small consignments of marijuana toward the U.S. border. It is believed that thanks to his uncle's contacts, he also secured a position as an agent in the corrupt Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" (DFS), whose regional commander was Rafael Aguilar Guajardo—a future deserter and turncoat who would help found the Juárez Cartel. Assigned to learn the smuggling trade in Durango, young Amado struck up a wild friendship with Jaime Herrera Nevares's son, Jaime Jr., the two becoming inseparable: smoking dope, crashing cars, and visiting whorehouses together.

Learning the Cross-Border Trade (1980–1986)

Carrillo Fuentes was next sent by his uncle to Ojinaga, Chihuahua, to observe the cross-border smuggling operation being run into Presidio, Texas, by Pablo "El Pablote" Acosta Villareal—the so-called Zorro del Desierto or "Desert Fox," or Zorro de Ojinaga. At first, Carrillo was enrolled on the books as Acosta's chauffeur and bodyguard, although his duties soon included roaming the nearby district to buy up independently-grown marijuana crops from farmers for shipment to El Suspiro Ranch near Ojinaga, where they could be packaged and hidden inside pickups to be smuggled across the border. Carrillo successfully made numerous runs as a "mule" to deliver bulk cargoes into Texas and return with packages of American dollars for his boss. And the 25-year-old soon developed a partiality for employing light aircraft, too, buying a single-engine, fixed-landing-gear Cessna 206 as early as 1981 to initiate his own delivery system.

When Castor Alberto Ochoa Soto, a high-ranking member of the Medellín

Cartel, arrived in Ojinaga in 1984 to begin coordinating the trans-shipment of Colombian cocaine across the Rio Grande into the United States, he found the 27-year-old Amado now working in partnership with Acosta and transformed into a wealthy and seemingly well-educated young man, living in an elegant three-story hilltop house at the center of town, frequently visiting Guadalajara with an impressive escort of bodyguards, and who had been joined in the business by younger siblings Cipriano, Vicente, and Rodolfo.

Carrillo's father, Vicente, died in April 1986, and one year later the young smuggler (thanks to a meeting arranged by Federal Highway Patrol *comandante* Fernando Ramírez and the wealthy jeweler Tomás Colsa McGregor) allegedly paid a $1 million bribe to the murderous *comandante* of the Intercepción Aérea, Terrestre y Marítima or "Aerial, Land, and Maritime Interception" division of the Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" (PJF), Guillermo González Calderoni, to eliminate Carrillo's mentor, Acosta. A surprise descent was arranged, González Calderoni's pair of blue-and-white Bell 212 helicopters with a strike force of 17 hard-bitten *federales*—guided through U.S. airspace by an FBI helicopter—swooping down on Acosta's hideout in the Rio Grande border-village of Santa Elena, Chihuahua [opposite Big Bend National Park] on April 24, 1987, killing him after an hour-long shootout.

Initial Success (1987–1988)

With his immediate superior removed and supported by his brothers, the 30-year-old Amado Carrillo assumed full title as Ojinaga's underboss, as well as a lieutenant of Rafael Aguilar Guajardo's and Rafael Muñoz Talavera's regional Juárez Cartel. Carrillo's familiarity with local growers and smugglers helped ensure a smooth transition, and by now the business of transshipping Colombian cocaine was rapidly expanding in volume, so that he began to profit significantly, expanding his aerial-smuggling operations by creating the Compañía de Aviación Taxi-Aéreo de Centro Norte (TAXCENO) or "Center North Air-Taxi Aviation Company" as a front in July 1988—registering this enterprise in Torreón under his second wife's name, Sonia Barragán Pérez. This fledgling company's aircraft consisted of a Cessna 421 and 206, a twin-engine Aztec Piper, an 80 and 75A twin-jet Rockwell Sabreliner, plus a Lear 25 jet—all capable of landing and taking off from short runways, in addition to their legitimate commercial uses.

Leaving his Ojinaga cross-border operations in the hands of a subordinate, Amado then moved in early 1989 to Hermosillo, Sonora, to be closer to the Colombian trade's epicenter (and after his brother Cipriano Carrillo had been killed there under mysterious circumstances, shot in the mouth with an AK-47 during an encounter with the police).

Unexpected Arrest (1989–1990)

But on June 27, 1989, Amado Carrillo carelessly allowed himself to be detained on a weapons charge for flashing a gold-plated, bejeweled .45-caliber gun at a party in Huixopa, Sinaloa. Suspecting that such an expensive weapon could only belong to a senior drug-figure, some military officers in attendance carried him off to their base and held him as part of the government's vigorous campaign against fugitive Guadalajara Cartel members in the wake of DEA agent Enrique Camarena's murder. Certain that they had landed a big prize, they subjected Carrillo to beatings and torture over the next ten days so as to reveal his true

identity, before his family was at last able to fly in a retired Army general aboard one of their planes who directed the base commander, Captain Baltazar Pantaleón, to surrender his captive to the civilian Ministerio Público or "Public Ministry" on July 7, 1989.

Initially using the pseudonym "Juan Carlos Barrón Ortiz," Carrillo portrayed himself to his new interrogators as a legitimate cattleman who owned El Jagüey Ranch in Villahumada and El Suspiro in Ojinaga, but was nonetheless charged under his real name by August 21, 1989. This was to be the only time that Carrillo would suffer the indignities of incarceration during his lengthy criminal career, but his considerable wealth ensured that he would be comfortably housed in Mexico City's Reclusorio Preventivo Oriente or "Eastern Preventive Penitentiary" until June 9, 1990—by which time he had successfully bribed federal *magistrado* or "magistrate" Gilberto Chávez Priego to release him for "lack of evidence." Both the influential Guadalajara Cartel "godfather" Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo and Carrillo's own uncle Ernesto Fonseca, who were being held as inmates in this same prison, were astonished to see their young subordinate win his discharge.

Rise to Power (1990–1993)

With all of the Guadalajara Cartel leadership now behind bars, the 33-year-old Carrillo and his brothers were free to pursue their cross-border smuggling with even greater vigor, and he proved to be an energetic and resourceful leader. Amado once more expanded his aerial operations by purchasing an additional nine light airplanes in the United States, and his drug deliveries began reaching as far north as New York, while he also dealt directly with suppliers in Medellín and began flying in five half-ton monthly shipments with his air fleet. "I've seen him shoot from an acorn into a tree," remarked one DEA agent around that time. As the Carrillos' shipments through Ciudad Juárez soared, he transferred his headquarters there, and learned much about the intricacies of border trafficking. By February 1993, the scope of Carrillo's influence throughout Mexico was dramatized when General José de Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, in command of its national antidrug campaign, was unmasked as one of his paid collaborators and arrested. [Legend has it that their paths had first crossed six years earlier, while attending a baptism in Badiraguato.]

But Amado Carrillo's booming business not only brought in allies and partners, it also caused serious frictions with his nominal Juárez Cartel superior, 43-year-old Rafael Aguilar Guajardo. Matters came to a head after a heated argument in El Rodeo Restaurant in Ciudad Juárez, during which the ex-DFS *comandante* slapped Carrillo. Shortly thereafter, Aguilar was killed while on Easter vacation with his family at Cancún, Quintana Roo, gunned down when AR-15s were fired from a pair of passing black automobiles as he stood on a dock, having just returned from a pleasure-boat outing on Monday, April 12, 1993. (His wife and one son were also badly wounded.) The cartel's other boss, Rafael Muñoz, having been arrested seven months earlier in Tijuana while attempting to flee to Canada, Amado Carrilllo had the only remaining successor—Cuauhtémoc Ortiz, another ex-DFS agent—abducted in Mexico City's luxurious Fraccionamiento "Campestre" on May 6, 1993. Ortiz's tortured body, with a plastic bag taped over its head, was found in an armored white Jeep Cherokee left in a mall parking-lot.

That same month, the 37-year-old Carrilllo would lay claim to the Juárez Cartel

leadership and its subordinate smuggling-corridors into West Texas and New Mexico, although his ascension did not go entirely uncontested. Carrillo himself was almost killed on November 24, 1993, when just before 10:00 p.m. a dozen men armed with machineguns entered the Ochoa Bali Hai Restaurant, a chic seafood-eatery located at 1524 Insurgentes Sur Avenue in Mexico City, where he was dining with his wife, six children, and eight bodyguards. Three of Carrillo's henchmen were instantly cut down while he and his family dived under the table, but the head of his security detail, Alcides Ramón "El Metro" Magaña, successfully resisted until the would-be assassins mistakenly killed a civilian architect who was dining nearby—presumably having confused this innocent bystander for their intended target, as very few photographs existed of Carrillo. [Rumors would later identify these hit men as "badge-carrying cops on the payroll of the nation's most-wanted drug lord, alleged Gulf Cartel chief Juan García Ábrego . . . sent to assassinate his top rival."]

"Lord of the Skies" (1994–1995)

As newly crowned boss, Amado Carrillo would secure his position by increasing the Juárez Cartel's size through contracting out drug shipments to a few new cells, while also—although capable of dealing ruthlessly with competitors or disloyal associates, it later being claimed that he personally ordered more than 400 murders during his criminal career—presiding over meetings every 90 days at a resort near Golfo de Santa Clara to confer peaceably with other cartel leaders, so as to "straighten out differences and keep the flow of business going, without the disruption of cartel violence." DEA agents would refer to this loose-knit affiliation as "the Mexican federation" of cartels, a cooperative whose members shared intelligence, equipment, and smuggling routes.

But two of Carrillo's other innovations would soon cause his own group's profits to soar: first by boldly employing much larger aircraft to fly in much larger cargoes, importing at least seven huge loads of Colombian cocaine (some weighing as much as 15 tons) between May 1994 through March 1995 aboard secondhand, refurbished Boeing 727 and Caravelle jets, plus Lockheed Turboprops, in addition to moving even more product by sea aboard container ships. It was later said that such wholesale methods permitted him to handle four times as much cocaine as all his competitors combined.

The scope of his aerial operations would be revealed by its few failed flights: a 27-year-old, third-hand Sud SE 210 Caravelle 10R twin-engine jetliner registered with Aerosucre airline departed San Andrés Island, Colombia, on August 4, 1994, and—after refueling in Panama—continued over the Yucatán Peninsula into Mexican airspace and landed on a defunct mining-company airfield near Sombrerete, Zacatecas. Its flight having been observed on U.S. radar, *federales* soon appeared in trucks and found that 7.5 tons of cocaine had already been extracted, although another 2.5 tons still remained aboard this Caravelle. It was impounded and flown to the Base Aérea Militar or "Military Air Base" (BAM) Número 1 at Santa Lucía in the State of Mexico, to be incorporated into the Fuerza Aérea Mexicana or "Mexican Air Force" (FAM) as a transport.

A second aged Caravelle registered with the Colombian airline SEC was detected flying into Mexican airspace on March 11, 1995, and filmed as it landed at Punta Baja near Guaymas, Sonora, where its cargo was

offloaded. This aircraft was likewise seized and incorporated into the Mexican Air Force—but such profligate use of high-priced airplanes not only yielded immense profits, it also enhanced Carrillo's prestige in trafficking circles, and earned him fame as *Señor de los Cielos* or "Lord of the Skies." For forwarding his intermediary stockpiles on to northern Mexico's actual crossing-points into the United States, Carrillo also used twin-engine Aerocommander 500s, taking off from outside of Mazatlán to land at small airstrips near Ojinaga, Palomas, and Agua Prieta.

New Trafficking Arrangement (1995–1996)

The second innovation crafted by Amado Carrillo came at the expense of his Colombian purveyors. During the summer of 1995, with direct participation from the Central Intelligence Agency and DEA, the Colombian National Police mounted an unprecedented crackdown on the Cali Cartel leadership, apprehending seven high-level members—including the Rodríguez-Orejuela brothers. Although some of these bosses would try to continue directing their traffic from behind bars, deliveries shrank and profits sagged, while dissent spread. Despite visiting Havana's Hotel Nacional with a large entourage from August 18–25, 1995, then flying on to Spain and Jerusalem [according to file: DGALI/4054/97], Amado Carrillo was moving quickly behind the scenes to take advantage of the Colombians' debilitation by contracting to buy eight four-ton shipments of cocaine directly from Luis Amado Pacheco, the principal *coca* grower in Bolivia. The first three of these loads had already been flown straight to the border-city of Mexicali in Baja California before the Colombians could retaliate by tipping off the Bolivian authorities, so that Pacheco was arrested and his fourth four-ton consignment seized when his plane landed to refuel at Lima's airport in Peru on September 26, 1995.

With the Cali leadership angry at being cut out from their lucrative middleman role, an all-out drug war seemed imminent, when Carrillo proposed a series of meetings in neutral Guatemala, El Salvador, and Panama in which to hammer out a new working relationship. His Juárez and allied Mexican cartels would be allowed to cut their own independent deals with Bolivian and Peruvian suppliers, he argued, so as to maintain a constant drug-flow into the United States and preserve their market shares. The Colombians could still forward cocaine from South America—although only as far as Mexico, where they would be paid in cash per load, and leave its actual transshipment and distribution into the United States to one of the Mexican outfits. For the Colombians, it meant less risk—but also less money, and a loss of their direct access to the world's wealthiest drug-consuming market. However, they had no choice but to accept, despite offering a million-dollar bounty for Carrillo's assassination.

A pair of elderly Caravelles consequently took off on the night of November 4, 1995, bearing a combined cargo of 25 tons of South American cocaine, worth an estimated half-billion dollars, according to the DEA. One, registered with the Colombian Iberoamericana de Carga airline, crash-landed next dawn on El Baturí Plain near Bahía de Todos los Santos in southern Baja California, although its contents were quickly offloaded onto trucks (with help from the local police) and driven away before this damaged craft was set ablaze. The second landed safely elsewhere. A couple of weeks later, DEA field-agents from El

Paso, Texas, would grudgingly describe the "Lord of the Skies" as:

> *. . . meticulous, cautious, and elusive. Carrillo's style, the investigators say, has kept him a free man in addition to making him rich. He never carries guns or drugs. He has not spoken publicly about any of the allegations against him, and he has never served more than eight months in jail. He has never been convicted of a crime* [having merely been held pending trial during the summer of 1989, before being released for "lack of evidence" in June 1990].

That same year of 1995, Carrillo's cartel had even bought a $10 million stake in the Grupo Financiero Anáhuac, a struggling private Mexican financial-group that included a banking unit named Banco Anáhuac—useful as a currency-exchange house for laundering illegal profits. And the 39-year-old drug boss's good fortune extended further when his major rival, Gulf Cartel leader Juan García Ábrego, was unexpectedly arrested in January 1996, leaving Carrillo with the most powerful intact drug-organization in Mexico.

International Fugitive (1996–1997)

Yet Carrillo—his paranoid fear of Colombian assassins and jealous competitors worsened by his personal cocaine consumption—flew out of Mexico with a diplomatic passport to visit Cuba from April 7–12, 1996, and his unease deepened after the PGR issued a warrant for his arrest that same July [at the behest of the American authorities, as he was under indictment on U.S. federal drug-smuggling charges in Texas and Florida]. It is believed that shortly thereafter, Carrillo sent an advance team of economic analysts into South America to look for possible countries to relocate, the chief of Chile's antidrug police Mario Mallea Llanos later declaring that after having visited Argentina and Brazil:

> *We found documentation that they had operatives who researched and examined the whole gamut of the economy and investment opportunities. Chile seemed a good nation to them because of a solid, growing free-market economy.*

When three of Carrillo's Lear jets were spotted departing Toluca without filing flight-plans on *vuelos negros* or "black flights" to Culiacán on Saturday, January 4, 1997, they were met and impounded upon arrival by soldiers and judicial agents, along with "thousands of dollars in cash and more than two-dozen suspected drug traffickers—including uniformed police officers." Next day, more than 60 soldiers and policemen aboard 15 vehicles sent by General Guillermo Martínez Nolasco, commander of the Ninth Military Zone, raided the huge Santa Rosa Ranch complex in the Villa Ángel Flores *sindicatura* of the municipality of Navolato at midnight on Sunday, January 5–6, 1997, interrupting the wedding celebrations of the drug-lord's younger sister Aurora in hopes of catching the kingpin and other criminal bosses among its 1,000 guests. But a last-minute tip had forewarned Carrillo, so that he had slipped away in an old car driven by a woman with her children. Having flown into Culiacán only that same morning with his 20-person entourage aboard a commercial flight from Mexico City, Carrillo was alarmed by such a close call. [Five years later, Army Major Victor Soto Conde would receive a 60-year sentence for providing this tip, having been paid by Carrillo's lieutenant Ismael Zambada.]

One week later, it is alleged that Carrillo presented a "live-and-let-live" proposal to the High Command of Mexico's Secretariat of National Defense (Sedena) on January 14, 1997—relayed through Brigadier General Jorge Mariano Maldonado Vega, the corrupt ex-director of Mexico City's Academia de Policía—requesting immunity for his Juárez Cartel in exchange for:

- collaborating in the eradication of *narcotráfico desorganizado* or "disorganized drug-trafficking";
- conducting his business as an entrepreneur, rather than a criminal;
- refraining from drug sales within Mexico, only exporting them to the United States and Europe;
- bringing in American dollars to invest in support of Mexico's economy; and
- without taking violent actions or rebelling against the legally-constituted Mexican authorities.

His terms were rejected out of hand by these four senior generals, so that shortly thereafter Carrillo was recorded—while personally handing a 60,000-peso payoff to a junior military officer (and undercover agent) at 100 Tamarindo Street in the wealthy Bosque de las Lomas district of Mexico City—as stating that he was "leaving the country and they would probably not see each other again."

Indeed, Carrillo was in Russia by the first week of February 1997, before traveling to Argentina one month later, and being driven under the pseudonym "Juan Antonio Arriaga" by car along with eight companions and half-a-dozen bodyguards into Chile on March 3, 1997. Apparently he was considering a new and lawful existence in that country, enlisting a local money-exchange run by Jaime Ventura Cohen to draw funds from two bank accounts that he held with Citibank in New York (allegedly totaling about $26 million, for which service Ventura was paid $400,000), intending to seek out investment and business opportunities. Around this same time, an informant back in Mexico divulged that Carrillo's Juárez Cartel was being run during his absence by his top lieutenants and affiliates Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel; Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno; Juan José "El Juanjo" Quintero Payán; Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García; his brother Vicente Carrillo; the lawyer Rubén Ángel Moreno; and the Beltrán Leyva brothers.

Carrillo resumed his nomadic existence and was next detected flying from Colombia to visit Cuba once more from April 11–24, 1997, founding a couple of companies there during his brief stay and inquiring about the necessary permits for doing business around the Mariel "free zone," before traveling back to Santiago de Chile. He remained in that South American country through May and into the first week of June, spending an estimated $6 million in buying 11 cars and "a dozen mansions, ranches, and condominiums," as well as establishing a front company named Hércules Ltd.

Accidental Death (July 1997)

Amado Carrillo departed Chile for yet another stopover in Cuba on June 9, 1997, and warily returned into Mexico five days later, having opted to risk altering his appearance through radical plastic-surgery and liposuction so as to deceive would-be assassins and government agents. It would later be noted that during his uneasy last stay in Mexico, Carrillo "rarely saw his

family or spent the night in the same place twice." Having assembled his surgical team, he was admitted under the pseudonym "Antonio Flores Montes of Zacatecas" to the small private Santa Mónica Clinic on Temístocles Street in Mexico City's Colonia Polanco and—not wishing to be left unconscious and vulnerable from anesthesia during various operations—underwent a single grueling eight-hour procedure between 11:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. on July 3, 1997. Wheeled into Room 407 to recuperate overnight, he was found lifeless next dawn, having died from a mixture of the anesthetic and sleeping-drug Dormicum, leading to heart failure.

Administration of his vast Juárez Cartel was temporarily assumed by a joint committee comprising his brothers Vicente and Rodolfo, his sister Angélica, Ismael "el Mayo" Zambada, and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera.

Settling One Last Score (November 1997)

Four months after Amado Carrillo's death, 66-gallon oil drums partially filled with cement and giving off a foul odor were found along the highway running from Mexico City toward Acapulco on November 5, 1997 near the town of Iguala, Guerrero. Upon being opened, it was found that they contained a thick, dark-red liquid which three weeks earlier had been human flesh. Transported to Mexico City for forensic examination, their contents were soon identified as the handcuffed, blindfolded, burned, tortured, and garroted remains—with fingernails torn out—of the Sinaloan ear, nose, and throat-specialist Jaime Godoy Singh, as well as doctors Carlos Humberto Ávila Meljem and the Colombian Ricardo Reyes Rincón, late members of the drug-lord's unlucky surgical team. A fourth physician named "Pedro Rincón and his family were clandestinely taken into the United States in November [1997], and put into the Witness Protection Program."

See also: Badiraguato; Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki"; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Juárez Cartel.

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Cemetery—see "Jardines del Humaya Cemetery"

Chihuahua Rehab-Center Massacre—see "Juárez Cartel: Suffering"

CISEN—see "Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS): Supplanted by CISEN"

Ciudad Juárez Car-Bomb Attack—see "Juárez Cartel: Suffering"

Cocaine. Highly-addictive stimulant originating from South America, whose elevated profit-margins produced a trafficking boom, fueling the rise of Mexico's first cartels.

Natives of the Andean highlands have chewed coca-plant leaves (*Erythroxylon coca*) for thousands of years as a stimulant, as well as to repress appetite and combat apoxia (altitude sickness). During the latter 19th century, its active component—cocaine hydrochloride—was first extracted, briefly serving as a common ingredient in patent medicines and other popular products such as cola drinks, before being restricted to medicinal uses because of complications. The American drug culture of the 1960s renewed demand for its whitish crystalline powder, which Colombian intermediaries began supplying by buying bulk amounts cheaply in Ecuador and Peru during the early 1970s, to sell as refined concentrates at huge markups in the United States.

Mexican Trans-Shipments (1975–1994) Smugglers dealing in marijuana and low-grade heroin exports via northern Mexico became aware of this Colombian trade's rich profits after Alberto Sicilia Falcón—a flamboyantly bisexual Cuban-born, American multimillionaire and international drug broker—was arrested in Mexico City in July 1975. Seeking to take over his lucrative trade, the prominent Mexican trafficker Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo succeeded in gaining his own direct connection two years later, by staging a spectacular folkloric show at his beach house outside Culiacán for major Colombian supplier Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha—nicknamed *El Mexicano* because of his love of all things Mexican. The resultant agreement called for Rodríguez's operatives to send some consignments to Mexico, for Félix's subordinates to transport across country and into the United States for a 25–30 percent commission. Félix's organization was soon raking in handsome returns when compared with the lower profits from marijuana or coarse heroin, so that other Mexican traffickers began looking for similar arrangements. [See "Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel: Initial Colombian Contacts."]

The subsequent American withdrawal from the drug-eradication campaign in Mexico, to instead concentrate on intercepting cocaine headed toward Florida from Medellín as of late 1978, not only resulted in a resurgence in Mexican marijuana and heroin production that next year—it also led the Colombians to redirect more and more loads through Mexico, combining to produce a trafficking boom. In order to minimize frictions, the influential Félix Gallardo created an informal coalition to oversee cocaine movements through the various gang-territories, which within a few years would be dubbed the "Guadalajara

Cartel"—Mexico's first. [See "Guadalajara Cartel."]

A surge of "crack" smoking (which gave more immediate and intense highs) in the United States during the 1980s further escalated demand. The Guadalajara Cartel was obliterated for its role in the savage murder of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena in February 1985, but its subgroups separated into regional syndicates and continued trafficking on an even greater scale—those with direct access to the U.S. market, plus Colombian cocaine-sources, soon coalescing into such powerful organizations as the Tijuana, Juárez, Gulf, and Sinaloa Cartels, increasingly hostile toward one another. By the mid-1990s, it was estimated that Americans were spending more money on cocaine than all other illegal drugs combined, while the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse of 1997 recorded approximately 600,000 crack users.

Direct Mexican Purchases (1995)

During the summer of 1995, the Colombian National Police mounted an unprecedented crackdown on the Cali Cartel leadership, apprehending its seven highest-ranking members. Some would try to continue directing their traffic from behind bars, but deliveries shrank and profits sagged, so that Juárez Cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes took advantage of their debilitation by buying eight four-ton shipments of cocaine directly from Luis Amado Pacheco, Bolivia's principal coca-grower, and flying these and much more straight to Mexico aboard ever-larger aircraft—wholesale methods that would permit him to handle four times as much cocaine as all his competitors combined.

With the surviving Cali leadership angry at being cut out from their lucrative middleman role, an all-out war seemed imminent, until Carrillo met with them and hammered out a new arrangement: the Colombians could still forward their cocaine—although only as far as Mexico, where they would be paid in cash per load, while leaving its trans-shipment and distribution in the United States to his Juárez and allied Mexican syndicates, who would also be allowed to cut their own independent deals with Bolivian and Peruvian suppliers. The Colombians had no choice but to accept, despite offering a million-dollar bounty for Carrillo's assassination. This innovator then went into hiding while his associates profited remarkably, and rival Mexican cartels soon began making similar arrangements of their own.

Continued Trafficking (1996–Present)

Cocaine consumption in the American market would plateau as of the 1990s, although for years to come it would still remain a significant source of income for Mexican cartels, who controlled 90 percent of U.S. imports by 2007, even before branching out into large-scale exports to Europe through West Africa and Sicily, as well as to Asia. Although eventually supplemented by fentanyl, methamphetamines, high-grade white heroin, and other opioids, cocaine's most significant impact had been from financing the evolution of Mexico's most powerful and dangerous cartels.

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel: Wealth and Power; Carrillo Fuentes, Amado: "Lord of the Skies" et seq.; Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel: Initial Colombian Contacts; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo": Learning the Business et seq.

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Cochiloco. Originally a 19th-century Spanish nickname for a low-born, uneducated person with an innate mental facility for mathematics, making such eccentric individuals valuable assets in business, etc.

Born in the dirt-poor rural hamlet of San Ignacio in Sinaloa, Manuel Salcido Uzeta acquired this nickname during his initial drug-trafficking days in the early 1970s for his phenomenal mental capabilities and photographic memory. Despite his lack of any formal education, he was later able to pass himself off as a successful "engineer" when he relocated in 1985 with his family to Coquimatlán, Colima, clearing a 900-acre ranch to stock it with 1,200 head of cattle and a stable of thoroughbred horses (as well as adding a lake enclosed with rose-bushes, ficus, and willow trees). It was only after Salcido was revealed to be a major cartel-boss responsible for at least 75 murders, and came to the attention of U.S. authorities during the late 1980s, that his unusual appellation was mistranslated by English speakers as "Crazy Pig"—an erroneous rendering that has since spread and persisted because of constant repetition in popular movies, television series, magazines, etc.

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Colima Cartel (1988–2006).

Once a successful crime syndicate, prosperous because it manufactured its own methamphetamines rather than rely upon foreign drug-sources, yet which has since become extinct.

Humble Origins (1978–1987)

In 1978, 13-year-old José de Jesús "Chuy" Amezcua Contreras of Pihuamo, Jalisco—an impoverished cattle-town about 30 miles east of the city of Colima—illegally entered California, where he was given a meager job by his uncle, a Los Angeles theater-manager named Arnoldo Amezcua Díaz. Five years later, the teenage Jesús became involved with older brother Luis Ignacio in smuggling undocumented aliens across the desert into San Diego, investing their profits into a small auto-repair shop. Some American clients then asked Jesús Amezcua whether he could bring in ephedrine from Mexico (where this key ingredient for manufacturing methamphetamine or "ice" had not yet been banned), giving him $50,000 to buy them 200 kilos' worth and smuggle it in from Tijuana.

"Kings of Ecstasy" (ca. 1988–2002)

This initial purchase revealed to the Amezcua brothers the high profitability in trafficking methamphetamines, against little organized competition from the outlaw motorcycle-gangs or small-time independent dealers who until then had carried on most of this trade. The brothers recruited heavily among relatives and close friends to staff the top two tiers of their resultant organization, thereby "insulating" it from official scrutiny; nonrelations were used to run lower-level operations, such as cooking and smuggling finished products into the United States.

Their small emergent cartel would handle a few lucrative trans-shipments of Colombian cocaine during the late 1980s and early '90s but preferred to deal in their own meth, which guaranteed them 100 percent of its profits. Jesús Amezcua and a couple of partners did enter into an arrangement in January 1993 with the Cali Cartel, but more significantly, the ambitious 28-year-old trafficker traveled alone to India that same year and personally placed large orders for inexpensive bulk-purchases of ephedrine, while establishing a business office in Thailand to handle the aerial transportation of one-and-a-half to two tons of this substance every six weeks into Mexico City. Realizing that Mexico's impending ban on ephedrine would soon complicate his traffic, Jesús Amezcua traveled to Holland as well in January 1994, and next month entered into another separate agreement with a European-based supplier, Fayez Ahmad Amir.

Amezcua's volume of ephedrine imports had soared to five tons a month as the date for Mexico's ban approached in October 1994, which he redirected to a newly-created front company in Tuxpan, Jalisco. Then, at a meeting with his partners in Tijuana in November 1995, he informed them that an additional source had been located in communist China, so that the amount of "ecstasy" being smuggled through San Diego's port of San Ysidro and distributed as far as Colorado, Texas, Florida, Georgia, and Washington, DC, rose exponentially. The number of clandestine labs and front companies that the Amezcua brothers controlled or acquired in Jalisco multiplied through more acquisitions in Baja California, Michoacán, Aguascalientes, Nuevo León, and the Federal District—thereby earning the family the sobriquet of *Reyes del Éxtasis* or "Kings of Ecstasy." They also entered into an amicable business-relationship with the Milenio Cartel of neighboring Michoacán, selling them wholesale batches of pills for resale.

Yet the Colima Cartel otherwise remained very low-profile and secretive, managed by Amezcua relations who did little to attract attention. Rarely did the Amezcuas resort to violence, instead preferring to use bribery and maintain good relations with the police, while not intruding into the territories or businesses of other traffickers. Eventually, though, their activities were noticed in official circles, resulting in Adán Amezcua being arrested in his hometown of Colima on weapons charges on November 10, 1997; then both Jesús and Luis Ignacio Amezcua were detained in Guadalajara on June 1, 1998, by soldiers and agents from the Fiscalía Especial para Atención a los Delitos contra la Salud or "Specialized Prosecutor's Office Regarding Crimes against Public Health" (FEADS), who flew them to Mexico City to face 50-year prison terms—although these charges were soon reduced.

During their incarceration, Patricia and other Amezcua sisters stepped in to assume command of cartel business, maintaining their market share. Their 31-year-old youngest brother, Adán, would be detained again in the municipality of Zapopan outside Guadalajara by soldiers and federal agents on May 3, 2001, this time receiving a 22-year sentence for *blanqueo de dinero* [literally "whitening of money" or money laundering]—as well as the subsequent Colima Cartel leader, Jaime Arturo "El Ojón" Ladino Ávila, who was seized by 20th Military Zone soldiers inside Colima's Harem Hotel at 10:45 a.m. on Saturday, January 25, 2003.

Survival under the Milenio Cartel (2003–2005)

Next month, the Colima Cartel would acquire a valuable new supplier of bulk

ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine: an immigrant from Shanghai named Zhenli Ye Gon, who had obtained his Mexican citizenship in 2002. Between February 2003 and July 2005, this new Chinese-Mexican citizen would import 33.8 tons of raw materials, which he bought from a factory located in a very remote corner of Mongolia near the Russian border and imported from China through the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán—to be transported circuitously through the Tierra Caliente region into large, well-hidden "megalabs" around Tepalcaltepec, Jalisco. [See "Ephedrine Intercept."] Despite their leadership losses, the Colima Cartel's production facilities remained a valuable asset, which they gradually began selling off to their longtime Milenio Cartel trafficking-associates, eventually disposing of most of them for substantial sums.

In 2005, the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) reported that for all intents and purposes, the Colima Cartel no longer existed, the PGR's September 2006 list of major cartels reading as follows (in descending order of strength and wealth):

- Juárez Cartel
- Gulf Cartel and Zetas
- Sinaloa Cartel
- Tijuana Cartel
- Milenio Cartel
- Oaxaca Cartel

Disintegration and Aftermath (2006–Present)

Shorn of its traditional bosses, Colima's unoccupied *plaza* was fought over by rival groups, General Rubén Venzor Arellano—commander of the Army's 20th Military Zone—declaring after numerous decapitated bodies were found strewn about the state in March 2009 that various syndicates were vying for supremacy. Original Colima Cartel survivors had already retreated into Guadalajara, while their clandestine megalabs and production facilities had been absorbed—mostly by the larger Sinaloa Cartel, the Milenio Cartel's new proprietary partners. The old Colima Cartel's final leader, Gerardo "El Tecacho" or "El Cochi" Mendoza Chávez, was eventually taken in as a Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación lieutenant, which by July 2015 was reportedly securing control (along with its Sinaloa Cartel allies) of the illicit traffic flowing through Colima's port of Manzanillo from as far away as Colombia and Peru. Almost one year later, though, Fernando "El Toro Valencia" Castillo Rodríguez—the Jalisco New Generation Cartel boss for Colima's *plaza*—would be apprehended and removed from the state in June 2016 by the Gendarmería de la Policía Federal.

See also: "Dragón," Operación; Ephedrine Intercept; Methamphetamines; Milenio Cartel.

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"Condor," Operation (1975–1987).

Early U.S.-Mexican collaboration to eradicate clandestine grow-farms in northern Mexico—not to be confused with the anticommunist campaign launched simultaneously by several Andean dictatorships with American backing.

Preliminary Phase: Operación "Trizo" or "Clearview" (1975–1976)

To initiate this Mexican campaign, the U.S. State Department first underwrote a smaller pilot-program to test the effectiveness of spraying illegal crops with low-flying, crop-dusting aircraft, a method favored in Washington, DC, because airborne eradication-teams would never come into contact with growers on the ground, thus precluding any bribery or threats. State's International Narcotics Control Unit spent $15 million in furnishing 39 second-hand Bell 206 helicopters and 22 light aircraft, all outfitted with tanks and undercarriage sprayers, plus an annual budget of $10 million to cover operating expenses. The American government furthermore chartered Evergreen International Aviation Inc., a private company out of Oregon, which was already commercially fertilizing and treating fields with pilots who were largely Vietnam War veterans—some of whom would turn out to be inveterate drug users. Paraquat or Gramoxone was to be sprayed on marijuana fields (*cannabis sativa*), while 2,9-dichlorophenoxy acetic acid (2,9-D) would be applied to poppy fields (*papaver sominiferum*).

This pilot program started on November 13, 1975, under the Mexican codename Operación "Trizo" or Operation "Clearview" for the Americans, with reconnaissance flights over the highlands of the 23,000-square-mile *Triángulo Dorado* or "Golden Triangle" of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa. Only five U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) airplanes flown by Mexican pilots were initially deployed, under the supervision of Mexico's Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) and the DEA—which also dispatched 30 field-agents to monitor and assist at airfields, bringing along a four-lens Multispectral Opium Poppy Sensor (MOPS) camera system allegedly capable of surveying 250 square miles a day and pinpointing illicit fields with 90 percent accuracy. But Mexico's wilderness never having been mapped in detail, such readings proved useless; any sightings would instead have to be plotted on a chart and written authorization requested before proceeding with a chemical drop.

Still, early results from this limited campaign proved favorable, an American government cable reporting that nearly "7,000 opium fields ready for harvest" had been identified by the spring of 1976, and a total of 14,633 fields sprayed by year's end—so that this project was deemed a model program, reporters and television crews being invited to accompany flights and record this rare success in the war against drugs. But the health hazards posed by such toxic applications among poor rural inhabitants were totally ignored, just like the collateral damage inflicted on surrounding vegetation and water-tables by drifting clouds and run-offs of poisonous defoliants. It would not be until later that questions would be asked in Congress. Meanwhile, major traffickers with corrupt politicians and police officials on their payrolls were already finding ways around this eradication program: the flamboyantly bisexual Cuban-born dealer Alberto Sicilia Falcón, for example, was rumored to be secretly bribing air crews to divert away from his own crops and spray those of his competitors.

Operation "Condor," Second Phase (1977–1978)

With demand for marijuana soaring in the United States—95 percent originating out of Mexico—it was announced shortly after the new president, José López Portillo, was

inaugurated on December 1, 1976, that a second, expanded phase of Operation "Condor" was to be launched, as the *Campaña Permanente de Erradicación* or "Permanent Eradication-Campaign" became fully implemented. Designed to destroy thousands of marijuana and poppy fields from the air, supplemented by overland sweeps through rugged mountain-terrain by Army columns, this phase began with a commitment of 5,000 troops and two-dozen helicopters early next year under the command of Major-General (*general de division*) José Ernesto Hernández Toledo of the Ninth Military Zone headquartered in Culiacán, Sinaloa, plus 350 PGR police agents under *comandante* Carlos Aguilar Garza [destined to eventually become a trafficker himself, murdered in prison in 1993].

An hour-long military parade through Culiacán to kick off this ground campaign began at 11:45 a.m. on January 16, 1977, with other troops simultaneously marching through Guamúchil and Los Mochis. The first results of this upgraded Operation "Condor" proved promising, many minor arrests being made and illegal plots destroyed over the next few months, although the Army acted with such a heavy hand as to virtually depopulate the mountainous interior through a mass exodus of 100,000 frightened natives—especially after some casualties were inflicted among military ranks. Under Operation "Condor's" broad-based authority, the Ninth Military Zone's next commander—Brigadier General Ricardo Cervantes García Rojas—even brusquely summoned Sinaloa's Governor Alfonso G. Calderón to a meeting on May 1, 1977, where he played him a recording of an informant describing how various state judicial policemen had been involved in the murder of an Army major. General Cervantes thereupon had the governor's bodyguards disarmed, and this politician escorted back to his offices by Army officers, to immediately dismiss the five suspected policemen—who were then detained and taken back to Culiacán's military headquarters, never to be seen again.

Frictions with their American partners also occurred, the Mexican government grounding all DEA reconnaissance planes in the Sierra Madre as of September 1977, after some of its field-operatives had publicly suggested that Mexican pilots were "all corrupt" and required constant supervision. President Jimmy Carter unwittingly added to these ill feelings by erroneously telling a Washington correspondent on January 12, 1978, that the eradication program was being conducted by American helicopters and pilots, which rankled since the Mexican government was by then spending $40 million annually in sustaining Operation "Condor," and 17 of its personnel had been killed in crashes or shootouts.

A total of 23,764 fields had nonetheless been destroyed throughout the Triángulo Dorado by November 30, 1977, so that heroin and marijuana exports to the United States dropped by half and street-prices shot up exponentially in American cities during this campaign's first three years, being dubbed the "Mexican Miracle" by the press. General Félix Galván López, Mexico's secretary of defense, proudly proclaimed on February 25, 1978, that more than 65,000 opium crops and 46,000 marijuana fields had been destroyed between 1970 and 1976, and 18,000 arrests made. A *New York Times* journalist observed around this time:

> *. . . the supply of Mexican heroin had been reduced by one and a half tons in a single year, and its retail purity was at the lowest level in seven years. As a result, heroin overdoses had been dramatically reduced.*

But in Mexico, such sweeping success was reflected in an upsurge of shootings between traffickers around Culiacán, feuding over the constricting supplies and diminishing profits out of the United States. [In that small city alone—population: 215,000—300 drug-related murders had already been recorded in 1975.]

Guadalajara Cartel's Emergence (1980)

Top *narco* bosses remained relatively unscathed by Operation "Condor" because of the hefty bribes that they regularly paid police, military, DFS, and PRI officials, so that their grow-operations weathered this storm while many of their smaller and less well-connected competitors went under. When the Federal Attorney-General's Office announced on June 20, 1978, that another 16,074 poppy fields had been sprayed—but only 2,720 marijuana fields—the authorities attributed this statistical disparity to their campaign's success, as well as an unusually prolonged drought. But U.S. observers noted that the removal of American monitors from the helicopters had resulted in changed spraying-patterns, rumors circulating that some Mexican crews were accepting payoffs to substitute fertilizer and water instead of herbicides on their drops. One American visitor to the Sierra Madre wrote:

> *If you're rich and a landowner, you and the Government are probably cousins. They don't destroy dope on friendly farms.*

He added that it was quite impossible to grow any marijuana at all, "if you haven't made your deal with the *federales*."

Nevertheless, given this period's uncertainties, many drug lords had begun buying homes as retreats for their families in Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city [1970 population: 1.2 million], acquiring splendid villas so as to enjoy the luxuries of civilized life far from any dangers of arrest or gunplay around their grow-operations, which they continued to manage from afar. This exodus of bosses accelerated after the legendary trafficker Pedro Avilés Pérez, widely known as *León de la Sierra* or "Lion of the Mountains," was executed by soldiers on Culiacán's outskirts on September 15, 1978. The killing of such a wily, veteran operator spread greater concern among the bosses, so that most had permanently relocated with their families into Jalisco's capital by the end of that same year.

Simultaneously, Washington started to lose interest in its Mexican campaign, instead becoming more preoccupied about the tons of potent cocaine arriving in Florida as of late 1978 from Medellín, representing a much greater public-health threat. This shift in Washington's priorities was quickly felt in Mexico, the author Froylán Enciso noting:

> *As of 1979, the quantities of Mexican marijuana and heroin entering the United States began a steep ascent; while at the same time, notwithstanding the tens of millions of dollars which the Americans were investing in these eradication programs, DEA agents did not participate in any verification activities during the last eighteen months of the administration of Pres. José López Portillo* [summer 1981 to autumn 1982]*, they remained confined to their embassy.*

Ironically, an unintended consequence of Operation "Condor" had been to drive previously disperse drug-bosses into close proximity in Guadalajara, where the influential Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo would soon draw together numerous colleagues and form a "Guadalajara Cartel," so

as to coordinate the traffickers' far-flung operations.

Operation "Condor," Third Phase (1982–1987)

The joint governmental campaign was revived toward the end of President López Portillo's administration in late 1982, 5,000 troops and hundreds of Federal Judicial Police agents once again descending upon the Triángulo Dorado to destroy poppy and marijuana fields, while the United States committed an additional $150 million toward providing Mexican agencies with new aerial-photographic and telecommunications equipment, helicopters, planes, and technical assistance. DEA agents planned and assisted their Mexican counterparts in identifying illicit crops and training pilots in spraying techniques, large fields proving particularly vulnerable to such defoliants, as they remained easily detectable from the sky (although complaints grew louder about the tons of paraquat being dumped, permanently contaminating the terrain and ruining many farming communities).

It has also been argued that Operation "Condor" had other unintended "knock-on" effects, such as shifting large-scale cultivation out of the Golden Triangle into smaller, even more inaccessible corners of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Chiapas. The most committed traffickers furthermore adapted to these new realities by abandoning heroin and marijuana altogether in favor of cocaine, so that within a decade Mexico would become the main trans-shipment platform for Colombian loads reaching the United States. Its enormous additional profits would in turn trigger "cartelization," by amplifying the power and influence of strategically-placed regional bosses: major traffickers being able to create monopolies by absorbing or driving smaller groups out of business, and wars ensuing between megacartels—which the strongest and most violent would win.

According to the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional or "National Defense Secretariat" (Sedena), Operation "Condor" was officially concluded on January 31, 1987, having netted 2,019 traffickers at a cost of 19 soldiers and 27 civilians killed. Nearly 10,000 Army personnel had participated over its 12-year span, plus a like number of naval forces and PGR agents—yet despite being proclaimed a success, violence had mushroomed in most cities of Sinaloa and Durango, while peasant growers continued planting their myriad small crops undeterred.

See also: Caro Quintero, Rafael; Guadalajara Cartel; Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel.

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Cuerno de chivo—see "AK-47 Assault Rifle: Introduction into Mexico"

Cuinis, Los (2010–Present).

Although not an independent cartel, this powerful and secretive organization was described in a 2015 DEA assessment as the "wealthiest criminal gang in the world."

Background (1980–1996)

Their curious name derives from its founder's childhood nickname, Abigael "El Cuini" González Valencia. Born in Michoacán's small rural city of Aguililla on October 18, 1972, he was one of 18 children sired by J. Abigael González Mendoza and his wife, Estela Valencia Farías, including brothers Arnulfo, Ulises Jovani, Elvis, Édgar Edén, Mauricio, Gerardo, José, and Luis Ángel, plus sisters Rosalinda, Noemí, Berenice, Marisa, Ivette, María Elena, Érika, Estela, and Abigaíl. Because of this enormous brood of siblings, local townspeople dubbed the González Valencia clan as the *Cuiniques* or "Cuinis" for short—a joking reference to the ancient Purépecha or Tarascan name for the prolific local squirrels (*spermophilus adocetus*), which commonly produce litters of a dozen pups or more.

Beginning during the early 1980s, this family of humble avocado-growers joined the drug-export enterprise founded by their relations Luis Valencia Valencia and José Armando Valencia Cornelio, producing marijuana crops and low-grade heroin to be smuggled into the United States. [For greater detail on the Valencias' earliest operations, see "Aguacates, Cártel de los."] However, after this syndicate added the much more lucrative trans-shipment of Colombian cocaine to its business during the early 1990s, its profits would allow the Valencias to expand into adjoining Jalisco, Colima, and Nayarit, as well as add methamphetamines obtained from the neighboring Amezcua Contreras brothers to their narcotics inventory [see entry under "Milenio Cartel"].

Abigael González became an active participant in the Valencias' trafficking business around the age of 20, slipping illegally into California—where he would continue to be called "El Cuini"—along with the longtime family friend Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera Cervantes. At first, they sold their own homegrown marijuana and heroin, before diversifying. "El Mencho" was arrested along with his brother Antonio in 1994, and sentenced by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California to ten years in prison for conspiracy to distribute heroin—although he was released after serving only three, and returned into Mexico to marry Armando's sister Rosalinda González Valencia and find temporary employment as a municipal police officer in Cabo Corrientes and Tomatlán, Jalisco.

Abigael González was also arrested, along with Fabián Felipe Vera López, in San Diego on May 2, 1996, charged with six counts related to the "manufacture, possession, and conspiracy to distribute methamphetamines in Fresno and Madera, California." His case [file Number 1: 96-cr-05113-AWI-6] opened before the Federal Court for the Eastern District of California one week later, and would record how on November 22 of that year, El Cuini was released after posting $80,000 bail. Ordered to reappear by April 28, 1997, he immediately fled back south into Michoacán.

Rise within the Milenio Cartel (1997–2004)

Details about the inner workings of the Valencias' backwater syndicate remain sketchy to this day, so that precise

information is likewise unavailable on the ascent of Abigael González and his family—as well as his close colleague Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera—through the Milenio Cartel hierarchy. This secretive organization weathered a government investigation in November 1999 and continued to profit substantially from Colombian transshipments, although the cartel's rising status would also bring weightier problems. In particular, the *milenios* would be drawn into a losing struggle to reassert their smuggling rights through the northern border-city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, where passage had been shut off by the expansionistic Gulf Cartel as of the spring of 2002. It would appear that the Cuinis were not directly involved in the subsequent frontline fighting, instead attending to business in Michoacán [for greater detail on the Valencias' actions, see "Milenio Cartel: Challenges, Defeats, and Retreat"].

Despite allying themselves with the more powerful Juárez and Sinaloa Cartels, their combined forces could not overwhelm the ferocious defense mounted by the Gulf Cartel's deadly paramilitary unit, Los Zetas. Milenio founder and longtime leader Armando Valencia Cornelio was furthermore arrested outside Guadalajara on August 15, 2003, causing morale to sag—coinciding with indiscriminate long-range Zeta attacks against noncombatant family members. During 2003–2004, most of the González Valencia family (as well as most other *milenio* civilian dependents) relocated out of Michoacán into Jalisco, while an intelligence assessment issued by the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) in February 2004 indicated that at least four other cartels were carving out significant spheres-of-influence within their home state:

- the Tijuana Cartel controlling the seaport and municipality of Lázaro Cárdenas, as well as Coahuayana, Aguililla, Arteaga, and Tumbiscatío;
- the Sinaloa Cowboys dominating Tinguindín, Tocumbo, Los Reyes, Sahuayo, Jiquilpan, Purepero, Peribán, and La Piedad;
- the Juárez Cartel operating in Morelia, Zitácuaro, Huetamo, Jungapeo, Tiquicheo, Tuzantla, Benito Juárez, and Susupuato;
- the Sinaloa Cartel maintaining branches in Carácuaro, Tacámbaro, Nocupertaro, Villa Madero, Acuitzio, and Turicato;
- while the dissolving Colima Cartel of the Amezcua Contreras still retained some allies in Apatzingán, Tafetán, Tepalcatepec, Ario de Rosales, La Huacana, Buenavista, Tancítaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, and Nuevo Trecho.

Leadership Role Exposed (August 2005)

The Gulf Cartel suddenly launched a strike directly against the Milenio leadership, which would also reveal the Cuinis' prominence among its upper echelons. Just past midnight, with 250 guests gathered at El Carril horseracing track in the municipality of Tonalá, Jalisco, hosted by the Asociación Mexicana de Criadores de Caballos Cuarto de Milla (Delegación Jalisco) or "Mexican Quarter-Horse Breeders' Association (Jalisco Delegation)," suspected Zeta attackers lobbed two fragmentation grenades out of the distant darkness into the crowd of 100 or so bettors congregated in its *palenque* or "cockfighting pit" at 12:45 a.m. on Tuesday, August 2, 2005. Four people were killed, another 27 maimed or wounded. The first police units to arrive on scene quickly realized that most victims were affiliated with the Millennium Cartel—a

minimum of eight having a "Valencia" surname—and noted a high proportion of foreign or out-of-state license plates among the 50 or so parked cars, suggesting that the perpetrators may have belonged to a rival gang.

Significantly, at least three of Abigael's brothers were listed among the survivors, along with a brother of "El Mencho" Oseguera, suggesting that both families had been present in numbers and their joint faction was now a permanent fixture among the cartel's elite. Officials would later declare that at least one of the dead "was from Michoacán, and his surname was Valencia," without elaborating further; but it is known that Abigael's brother José González Valencia was among the injured, as well as "El Mencho's" brother Antonio Oseguera Cervantes. When police investigators proceeded toward the hospital to record victim statements, five individuals—Édgar González Valencia, Luis Ángel González Valencia, Gerardo Serratos Valencia, Francisco Vázquez Paredes, and Raúl Castelo Vera—were arrested for trying to extract injured colleague José González Valencia prematurely from that medical facility, so as to avoid being named in the official report [file number PGR/SIEDO/251995/05].

Retreat and Subordination (2006–2009)

By 2006, Milenio leaders Luis Valencia Valencia and Óscar Orlando "El Lobo" Nava Valencia—reeling from their defeats at the hands of the Gulf Cartel and federal authorities in northern Mexico, plus the frightening Zeta raids murdering their members in eastern Michoacán—withdrew their *sicarios* from their home state altogether, instead retrenching around Jalisco, Nayarit, and western Michoacán. But weakness also obliged them to enter into a defensive alliance that subordinated them to Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's *Federación*, their direct operational overseer becoming the Sinaloa Cartel's regional underboss Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal, who promptly took over their profitable methamphetamine trade inherited from the Amezcua Contreras. The Milenios' workloads increased as they processed ever-larger cocaine consignments arriving from South America through Manzanillo, plus millions of U.S. dollars in returning proceeds—yet their individual incomes did not rise commensurately, so that disenchantment with this new arrangement set in among the rank-and-file.

[The Cuinis, however, seemed to have once again fared better than most of their colleagues, Gerardo González Valencia having become wealthy enough to purchase the beautiful Hotelito Desconocido or "Little Unknown Hotel"—designed by award-winning Italian architect Marcelo Murzilli, nestled near the fishing village of La Cruz de Loreto in the seaside municipality of Tomatlán, Jalisco—for $8.5 million on November 5, 2007, through the W&G Arquitectos front-company run by his wife, Wendy Dalaithy Amaral Arévalo.]

According to participants, the first inkling of an impending rupture came during the summer of 2009, when Milenio leader "El Lobo" Nava had a serious disagreement with his Sinaloan superior "Nacho" Coronel, during which they had "almost come to blows." The latter even attempted to have "El Lobo" Nava replaced, who was then rather conveniently arrested by soldiers on October 28, 2009, following a shootout at a *narcogranja* or "grow-farm" that he was visiting in the municipality of Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, Jalisco. The suspicious timing of this detention would later be

revisited, once his brother and successor as Milenio leader—Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Nava Valencia—was also arrested by Army special-forces in Guadalajara on May 6, 2010, and flown to Mexico City to face extradition to the United States.

Rupture (2010)

After this second apprehension, the internal Milenio chain-of-command indicated that Elpidio "El Pilo" Mojarro Ramírez was to succeed El Tigre as leader, but a descendant of the original founding family—Erick "El 85" Valencia Salazar—instead proposed Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera, who had previously served as "El Lobo" Nava's head of security and was now performing this same duty for Erick Valencia. Already dissatisfied with their uncomfortable subordination to the Sinaloa Cartel, several Milenio lieutenants such as Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos González and Gerardo "El Tecato" Mendoza—convinced that their earlier leaders El Lobo and El Tigre had been deliberately betrayed to the authorities by "Nacho" Coronel and "El Mencho" Oseguera—refused to go along with this suggested substitution.

Very quickly, the disputed Milenio leader Mencho Oseguera demanded that the mutinous Gerardo Mendoza be surrendered to his authority, which was ignored. Instead, Mendoza killed a few of El Mencho's men in Tecomán, who retaliated by abducting some 40 members of the dissident group off the streets of San Cristóbal. "El Molca" Pozos, leader of La Resistencia faction, would later tell his police interrogators how on May 10, 2010, a mere four days after El Tigre had been arrested, "clashes between the Milenio Cartel and the people of Nemesio Oseguera and Erik Valencia began, and a month later the Jalisco New Generation Cartel was announced." When asked whom they had been fighting, El Molca retorted: "against the Torcidos or the Cuinis, or the Menchos . . . that whole bunch of traitors" [a term deliberately chosen to reflect the rebels' conviction that their previous leaders had been sold out to the authorities by Cuinis who had forsaken their old allegiance, to instead adopt the name Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación—even though they were not even natives of that state].

Murders and counter-murders spread throughout June 2010, followed by massacres and beheadings, as both groups savaged each other and preyed upon their rivals' drug-operations. To further compound matters, the regional Sinaloan boss "Nacho" Coronel was unexpectedly killed in Zapopan by the Mexican military on July 29, 2010, removing any hope of reconciliation between the two warring factions. In the ensuing power-vacuum, "El Mencho" Oseguera traveled into Sinaloa that same summer and agreed to maintain local operations in Jalisco as before, subordinated to the Sinaloa Cartel and seconded by his brother-in-law Abigael González, now leader of his own shadowy "Los Cuinis" cell. La Resistencia leader "El Molca" Pozos could only try to forge whatever alliance he might arrange with the Gulf Cartel and La Familia Michoacana, briefly creating an unwieldy amalgamation known as the *Familia Milenio Golfo* or "Gulf Millennium Family" Cartel (MFG), which soon disintegrated.

Emergence of "Jalisco Nueva Generación" (2010–2012)

The tight partnership between "El Cuini" González and "El Mencho" Oseguera was publicly spearheaded by the latter, as head of the violent Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)—which soon drew together remnants of other Milenio cells, and

together with the Sinaloa Cartel inaugurated a successful war against the Knights Templar and Zetas, in the process claiming the title of "Mata Zetas" by such brutal tactics as leaving 45 bound, tortured bodies of Zeta *sicarios* dumped onto a main thoroughfare at their base at Boca del Río, Veracruz on September 20, 2011. This "Jalisco New Generation" Cartel quickly defeated La Resistencia and took undisputed control over the old Milenio smuggling-networks, expanding first eastward and then northward while sending death-rates soaring. Within six months, their operations had expanded from coast to coast, along the way bloodying or terrifying or corrupting police and military units, and—according to some—becoming the U.S. market's main supplier of crystal meth.

The CJNG's traditional rise to cartel power deviated notably from that of its secretive Cuini partners, who pursued a much more low-key approach, eschewing violence so as not to antagonize the authorities or draw any unwanted attention—despite being abundantly supplied with "costly, late-model weaponry." Instead, they moved quietly into spaces that had already been "cleared of their rivals," and also copied the Sinaloan tactic "of winning over the populace . . . by not inflicting extortions, nor charging *derecho de piso* fees, but rather offering protection against other criminal networks." Jalisco Attorney-General Eduardo Almaguer would later describe Los Cuinis:

> *They're the entrepreneurs. They've made big investments in property, in restaurants, car leasing. They're the ones who know how to do business and corrupt authorities.*

Almost unnoticed by the government, press, or public, with an impenetrable command-structure, some analysts mistakenly believed the Cuinis to be a minor affiliate of the CJNG, or its financial arm for *blanqueo de dinero* [literally "whitening of money" or money laundering]. But others would soon come to realize that Los Cuinis and CJNG were tightly allied by longtime family-bonds, working closely together and sharing assets, although following different paths—and that Abigael González's organization was actually the dominant partner, well on its way to becoming the "wealthiest criminal-gang in the world."

Winning Strategy (2012–2014)

Masked by the CJNG's noisy actions, "El Cuini" González had shrewdly crafted a new trafficking strategy, based upon the premise that it was unprofitable to try and sell into the American market as both southern groups would have to:

- ship their consignments through northern territories controlled by hostile rivals;
- pay large amounts in bribes and transit fees to numerous police, military, and customs agencies;
- evade the ever-more vigilant U.S. surveillance network and border patrols;
- accept losing a certain percentage of drug loads to interceptions; and
- extract millions in profits, without suffering confiscations or leaving behind a paper trail.

González had therefore deliberately set about making bulk shipments of Mexican methamphetamines and South American cocaine directly into Europe through Africa, as well as to Asia. No rival cartels were operating in those distant markets, nor was there a robust anti-narcotic collaboration between governments. By employing ordinary smuggling-methods, drugs went

through with scarcely any losses, and profit margins were very high without the additional costs of having to pay bribes. Moreover, proceeds could be reinvested into the purchase of legitimate moneymaking businesses or properties in those countries, whose banking transactions were not carefully scrutinized. [Abigael González, for instance, would become known for his frequent trips to Spain, buying various businesses in the chic Las Ramblas district of Barcelona.]

While the Sinaloa, Juárez, Gulf, Zeta, and Familia Michoacana Cartels fiercely disputed drug-routes leading into the United States, as well as contending against fully-mobilized Mexican and American law-enforcement agencies, Los Cuinis maintained their low profile until March 2014, when—based upon an investigation led by the Los Angeles Field Division of the DEA—a federal grand jury in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia indicted Abigael Gonzalez and Nemesio Oseguera on various charges, including being the principal leaders of a "continuing criminal enterprise."

Crippling Leadership Losses (2015–Present)

A year later, "El Cuini" González himself was arrested by naval special-forces and Policía Federal agents on Saturday, February 28, 2015, while dining in a Puerto Vallarta restaurant. In keeping with his low-key persona, he was accompanied by only a single Israeli special-forces commando as his bodyguard, plus two Colombian and two Venezuelan confederates, who were all detained. Fake identifications meant that his captors did not at first realize who their prisoner was, although a kilo of cocaine and fragmentation grenade ensured that they would be charged. After they learned his true identity, González apparently offered the *marinos* who were to parade him at a press conference in Mexico City $3 million to keep his face from appearing on television—a request that proved futile. By April 5, Abigael González had been convicted for "his presumed complicity in crimes against [public] health, through possession of 'chloral hydrate of cocaine' for purposes of commerce."

The removal of his clever, calculating discipline would soon lead to the unraveling of Los Cuinis, left in the hands of his undisciplined siblings at a time when their criminal enterprise was coming under intense scrutiny both at home and internationally. The U.S. Treasury Department belatedly elevated Abigael González and his drug-trafficking organization to its list of most-wanted "kingpins" as of April 8, 2015. One month later, the Mexican government launched a major offensive code-named Operativo "Jalisco" against the CJNG partners, failing to apprehend "El Mencho" Oseguera but making numerous captures in subsequent months, such as his 25-year-old son, Rubén "El Menchito" Oseguera González; the CJNG *plaza* boss for Guadalajara; and the cartel's second-in-command. Even their luxurious Hotelito Desconocido resort was shut down for its suspected role in money laundering on August 19, 2015, and El Mencho's 57-year-old brother, Antonio, was arrested by soldiers and Federal Police agents who pulled his car over early on the Thursday morning of December 3, 2015, in the municipality of Tlajomulco, Jalisco.

Rival gangs, envious of Los Cuinis' wealth, attacked the now-exposed syndicate. As Abigael's 35-year-old brother, Elvis González Valencia, was driving home in his white Chevrolet Suburban SUV from a New Year's Eve party in San Miguel el Alto

on Guadalajara's western outskirts on January 2, 2016, he stopped to relieve himself by the roadside and was shot from a passing pickup. Struck in his right arm by two bullets, Elvis González was taken by his entourage at dawn to the private Hospital Regional de San Miguel el Alto, before being transferred for surgery to the regional Real San José Hospital at the intersection of Lázaro Cárdenas and Niño Obrero Avenues in Zapopan. However, having failed to satisfactorily identify himself when interviewed by federal authorities, he was arrested while still recuperating in that hospital on Sunday, January 3, 2016 (although eventually released from Altiplano Prison on December 14, 2016).

International sanctions began against their empire, Uruguayan police detaining 11 people in Montevideo on April 22, 2016, including Abigael's brother and successor Gerardo González Valencia and a woman identified as his wife, Wendy. Both had financial ties to a pair of front companies—Montella Global S.A. and Deltodo Enterprises—that had been incorporated in Panama so as to invest in more real-estate at Punta del Este (where Gerardo González had already owned a $2 million mansion since 2011), as well as to purchase several ostentatious luxury vehicles. The couple furthermore owned industrial properties in China and Russia, acquired through the Uruguayan firm Asesores y Consultores del Sur Limitada (Asconsur). However, the authorities suspected that all of these investments were actually intended to conceal Cuini profits, so that next month Gerardo and his wife were condemned to prison and obliged to forfeit $10 million.

Subsequently, yet another member of the extended González Valencia clan—José Luis "Don Chelo" Gutiérrez Valencia, father-in-law of elusive CJNG leader "El Mencho"—was killed during a confrontation with naval special-forces on December 5, 2017, 11 days after having been released from Puente Grande prison. A third brother—42-year-old José González Valencia, who had been living in Bolivia for two years after fleeing from Mexico—was arrested at a beach resort near the Brazilian coastal city of Fortaleza, after arriving with his family for a Christmas holiday on December 22, 2017. Cuini leadership losses continued the next year, when a fourth and fifth brothers—Arnulfo and Ulises Jovani González Valencia—were surprised by soldiers and federal agents from the División Antidrogas or "Antinarcotics Division," who raided their residence in the Fraccionamiento Parque Virreyes of Zapopan as part of Operación "Escudo Titán" on Tuesday, June 26, 2018.

See also: Aguacates, Cártel de los; Jalisco Nueva Generación, Cártel; Milenio Cartel.

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D–E

There was no professional investigation; no bad investigation, either. There just wasn't any investigation. Whenever crimes happened, [we the] police would [just] hide in our offices.

—César Muñoz, chief of the Ciudad Juárez police, recollecting the fear engendered by the cartel war of 2008–2010

Dead, Disposal of the—see "Body Disposals"

Decapitations—see "Beheadings"

Derecho de piso. Expression unique to Mexico's criminal underworld, signifying a license to operate or pass through another's territory.

Such permissions have to be purchased from the dominant local gang or their police confederates, usually requiring frequent renewals, in exchange for assistance in facilitating an illegal activity—or extorted as "protection money" from legitimate businesses. A newspaper reported in 1991 that Guadalajara Cartel boss Manuel "El Cochiloco" Salcido Uzeta and two partners had found a South American vessel named *Chimborazo* with eight tons of Colombian cocaine aboard beached off Colima, so that they unloaded half before refloating this craft and sending it on its way toward Ensenada, Baja California; they then used their four tons *para que les dieran piso* or "to be given *piso*" to ship this unanticipated windfall through the Tijuana Cartel's jurisdiction into the United States.

And when the 24-year-old delinquent Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal fled his native Texas into Nuevo Laredo in 1998, he joined Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez's syndicate as a subsidiary dealer, agreeing to buy cocaine through him and pay $60,000 a month for "*piso*." Even an incarcerated Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán would explain to a pair of visiting DEA agents that same October 1998:

You think there is absolutely no respect, but there is. If someone enters a plaza*, he looks for who is in control of it and pays him. Because these people have to pay for other things. And if another person comes in and doesn't pay for the drugs, time, and people, then that is when a settling of scores takes place.*

Transit Fees

The term *derecho de piso* most commonly occurs in drug-trafficking deals, as *plaza* bosses along America's Southwest Border—already paying for police and military protection for their own consignments—extend such coverage to less powerful or transient groups in exchange for "tolls known as *pisos*." However, as profits from Colombian cocaine trans-shipments soared into the tens of millions of dollars during the 1990s, greedy bosses began expanding their

territorial claims so as to tap more deeply into this enormous flow of money: the Arellanos, for example, unilaterally extending their jurisdiction 100 miles east from their Tijuana base as far as Mexicali, cruelly punishing any trespassers along this entire borderland stretch. The Gulf Cartel did the same from its Matamoros headquarters, charging *derecho de piso* fees at every single town along the Tamaulipecan border: Reynosa, Díaz Ordaz, Camargo, Miguel Alemán, Ciudad Mier, etc.

Not surprisingly, excessive or escalating rates could provoke major conflicts. In February 2002, hot-tempered Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén—having paid the requisite *derecho de piso* to "El Chacho" García to smuggle two tons of cocaine through Nuevo Laredo into Texas—was infuriated when his three armored SUV transports were almost hijacked, so that he unleashed his deadly Zeta paramilitary force in an onslaught that left El Chacho dead and Nuevo Laredo under Gulf Cartel control by late May 2002. Five years later, "El Chapo" Guzmán and partner Ismael Zambada—aggrieved by the usurious *derechos de piso* demanded by Juárez Cartel leader Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo Fuentes—launched a devastating five-year war to diminish the latter's stranglehold along that borderline.

"Protection" Payments

Less well-known, but much more frequently charged by large cartels and lowly street-gangs, are *derechos de piso* extorted as "protection money" from small firms throughout Mexico. One typical example, among many, occurred around closing-time one night in July 2018, when a restaurant manager in Mexico City's well-to-do Polanco district was confronted by eight ruffians from the small, self-styled Unión de Tepito "Cartel," who said that "they had come to ask for the *derecho de piso*, or if not to allow their people to work there selling drugs or 'cloning credit-cards,' whichever they chose." After photographing the headwaiters and other staff, one of these extortionists displayed a pistol and said that if they did not accept, the thugs "would gun them down." The restaurant's owners consulted other nearby proprietors, and after learning three were already paying (and that 230 businesses had suffered arson fires over the past six years), agreed to come to terms.

But even immensely wealthy Gulf Cartel leader Cárdenas would personally threaten individual Matamoros shopkeepers for *derecho de piso* payments, his greed extending to street prostitutes, jewelers, ambulance crews, etc. Later, the Zetas would conduct themselves even more brutally, preying upon civilians within their own territories through kidnappings, murders for hire, extortions, and so on—callous cruelties that made them ever more hated, until their power collapsed and survivors began exacting revenge. The Sinaloa Cartel, by way of contrast, made a point of winning over their populace "by not inflicting extortions, nor charging *derecho de piso* fees, but rather offering protection against other criminal networks," a tactic that won them much goodwill and was later emulated by Los Cuinis.

See also: Cuinis, Los; Plaza; Unión Tepito, Cártel de la; Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003): Battle for Nuevo Laredo.

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Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS). Defunct "Federal Security Directorate," a precursor to Mexico's modern intelligence agencies, disbanded for its deep-rooted corruption.

Creation and Early Services (1947–1959)

Two months after his inauguration, Miguel Alemán Valdés (the first civilian elected as president in many decades) had summoned Army Lieutenant-Colonel Marcelino Inurrieta de la Fuente in late January 1947, instructing him to create an intelligence service that would report directly to the presidential office in Los Pinos Palace on political and social concerns, as well as provide the officeholders with protection—"like an FBI in *huaraches* [indigenous sandals]," Alemán added jokingly. Colonel Inurrieta duly set about creating the DFS and was appointed its first director, intending to staff this new agency with graduates from the Colegio Militar, so as to minimize vetting issues.

Only ten young officers were initially selected as DFS agents from among scores of applicants, being told to divest themselves of their military uniforms and acquire finely-tailored civilian apparel. Nicknamed *Los Tiernos* or "Tender Ones," these first volunteers were sent to the United States to receive FBI training, and returned to commence their covert surveillance-duties in Mexico. Inurrieta (who was also a champion marksman) hoped to deploy them as "gentlemen spies," capable of moving seamlessly through high society and professional associations, so to gather intelligence among such influential circles.

However, given its direct access to the presidency and ample budgets, the DFS soon began to attract some less-wholesome elements. Alemán himself personally secured positions for two of his longtime bodyguards, the hard-bitten brothers Hugo and Arturo Izquierdo Hebrard, who promptly embarrassed their sponsor by getting themselves arrested by fellow DFS agents for their role in the murder of a Tlaxcaltecan senator (and political opponent of the president) on February 17, 1948. But ex-Secret Servicemen, lawyers, medical doctors, and sons of wealthy families would continue to be recruited as well, the DFS being regarded as a plum posting and sure path to career advancement.

Its agents nonetheless gradually lost their gentlemanly veneer under succeeding administrations, instead gaining notoriety for brutality, being immune to any legal recourse because of their well-connected standing, plus top-secret operational methods. An exiled Fidel Castro would later recall them as the "fearsome Dirección Federal de Seguridad," when he and four companions were arrested by DFS agents on June 21, 1956, while driving around Mexico City prior to the revolutionaries' campaign in Cuba. After three days of interrogations and the detention of other members of their cell, including the Argentine Dr. Ernesto "El Ché" Güevara Serna, the DFS decided that these young refugees represented no threat to Mexico, so released them one month later.

Expanded Operations and Decay (1960–1981)

The DFS further tarnished its reputation during the 1960s and 1970s, when many agents were dispatched far beyond Mexico City to pursue small bands of "communist" guerrillas in the mountains of Guerrero and other remote rural corners of the hinterland. Far from official oversight and with credentials issued by the federal government's

very highest echelon, these field-agents—long known for conducting their own secretive, quasi-legal operations—could act with absolute impunity anywhere in the country, unworried by any timid interference from military, state, or municipal authorities. Charges of suspected torture, abductions, and even murders began to be levied against the DFS and its various paramilitary auxiliaries, during the ensuing "Dirty War" against native insurgencies.

Standards continued to fall, as was the case with Captain Rafael Chávarri—a presidential aide who was accepted into the DFS, only to become one of their first agents to become involved in drug trafficking during the 1960s (eventually winding up an inmate in Lecumberri Penitentiary, where he was murdered by fellow prisoners). The venal Miguel Nazar Haro, infamous for his role in the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre and for the part that his 240-man "White Brigade" death-squad had played during the Dirty War, was appointed DFS chief in 1978. In August 1981, the FBI briefed Mexico's attorney-general on a stolen-car ring that had been operating along the U.S. border, 28 members being indicted—more than half proving to be DFS agents, who had used their credentials to bypass checkpoints. Other agents of various ranks had participated in different stages of this criminal enterprise, from receiving requests for specific models to steal, to delivering the desired vehicles. Even Nazar himself was suspected of having received at least one stolen luxury car.

Partners in Drug-Crime and Dissolution (1982–1985)

When cartels began to reap unimaginable profits from smuggling tons of Colombian cocaine into the United States during the early 1980s, DFS agents were ideally placed to tap into this bounty, playing a key role in protecting traffickers and charging hefty percentages for their services. Postings sold by senior administrators could command two million pesos or more for a particularly lucrative station, while badges and credentials were also made available to private individuals, many agents' involvement with organized crime further blurring any distinctions of legality. Under the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988), the first nonmilitary officer to be appointed DFS director—José Antonio Zorrilla—not only profited personally from the proceeds of an auto-theft ring, but provided credentials to the likes of drug-baron Rafael Caro Quintero, so that he and his bodyguards could carry their powerful firearms past security checkpoints during their travels.

American DEA agent Enrique Camarena's covert investigations would prove the deep complicity of DFS agents with Caro Quintero's expansion of his vast marijuana grow-operations into Zacatecas, such as paying 50 million pesos advance seed-money to the corrupt local DFS commander, Felipe Aparicio Núñez, so as to begin buying up ranches around Fresnillo in 1983. The drug baron furthermore met on April 30, 1984, in Guadalajara's Suites Real Hotel with that city's DFS *comandante*, Miguel Ángel Viedma Heras, to discuss this same project. Ironically, DFS agents would participate in the major Army raid that descended upon this Fresnillo operation on May 28, 1984, making a wide-ranging sweep through its adjoining desert that netted 20 tons of refined marijuana and three tons of marijuana seeds, although making few arrests.

Angered by their financial losses at Zacatecas, Caro Quintero and the Guadalajara Cartel demanded to know from their paid police informants which DEA agent

had been responsible for this intelligence coup, so that—despite not initially being suspected—Camarena did notice that he would sometimes be tailed around Guadalajara as of June 1984 by DFS operatives. When a fellow DEA agent commented on this rather ominous development, Camarena dismissed his colleague's concern with the words: "It's nothing, just some DFS agents who want to see what we're doing." However, when a second major Army descent eradicated Caro Quintero's huge grow-operation at Búfalo, Chihuahua, on November 9, 1984—scattering thousands of field-hands and destroying 5,000–10,000 tons of high-quality seedless marijuana, with an estimated street-value of $2.5 billion—the furious kingpin eventually had Camarena abducted on February 7, 1985, and savagely tortured to death.

After being presented with his mutilated remains on March 7, 1985, the outraged U.S. administration of President Ronald Reagan exerted enormous economic pressure on Mexico to bring the culprits to justice. Mass-arrests ensued, the Guadalajara Cartel collapsed, and drug barons were no longer able to avoid captures or convictions. And among the casualties from this American reaction, the PRI government had no choice but to disband its thoroughly discredited Federal Security Directorate—yet even then, rather than admit one of their once-elite agencies had plunged into such a deep morass of corruption, a terse statement was issued in the bulletin of the Budgetary Office of the Secretaría de Gobernación or "Ministry of the Interior" on Friday afternoon, November 29, 1985, announcing that for cost-cutting reasons the DFS was being dissolved by President de la Madrid, and any of its salvageable units or equipment would be melded into a future intelligence-agency that would become known as the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional or "Center for Research and National Security" (CISEN).

Supplanted by CISEN (1989–Present)

This replacement unit was activated on February 13, 1989, a civilian agency intended to provide alternate sources of intelligence, beyond the traditional services offered by the Army and Judicial Police. Among numerous other surveillance duties, CISEN would come to serve as a clearinghouse for reports on cartel activities, as well as in devising counterstrategies. This new agency would itself suffer leaks over the coming years, yet nonetheless survived, employing some 3,500 personnel by 2013. Recent criticisms of its activities revolve around the fact that its authorization to monitor telephonic and electronic media have allowed it to spy on the party in power's political opponents.

Nevertheless, CISEN operatives were present in the very first wave of Operation "Jalisco," a major federal offensive launched to degrade the new Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel on May 1, 2015; and CISEN analysts also processed the raw intelligence-report that confirmed the arrival of the fugitive drug-lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán in Los Mochis on January 6, 2016, rushing this information to the Special-Operations Unit of the Navy that resulted in his capture.

See also: Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki"; Caro Quintero, Rafael; Guadalajara Cartel.

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"Dragón," Operación (2007)—see "Ephedrine Intercept"

Drones (2005–Present). Recent innovation introduced by the U.S. government to supplement surveillance resources along the Southwest Border, but now increasingly used by smugglers to make high-value deliveries.

Border Patrol Drones (2004–Present)
The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency (CBP) first tested a drone along the Arizona border during June through September 2004, deploying an Israeli-made Hermes 450 reconnaissance UAV or "Unmanned Aerial Vehicle" leased for $3 million from its manufacturer, Elbit Systems. Over a span of 71 flights, this craft assisted in the capture of 965 undocumented border-crossers, 845 pounds of marijuana, and two stolen cars. Although these results were not as good as could be achieved with a cheaper, piloted helicopter, they were sufficiently promising that a $10 million budget was allocated for the year 2005, with another $22 million for 2006.

The CBP subsequently acquired its first American-made drone in August 2005, an upgraded MQ-1 Predator-B "Sky Warrior" remotely-piloted vehicle (RPV) manufactured by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, which took flight on its initial patrol in October 2005. This craft crashed into a hillside near Nogales, Arizona, in April 2006, when the contractor flying the Predator mistakenly shut down its engine in midflight, but it was replaced by a second drone bought in September 2006. Meanwhile, a National Traffic and Safety Board (NTSB) investigation of the original crash—the first ever involving an unmanned aircraft—had found that the CBP's drone program was rife with operational problems, as well as political controversy, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) report having concluded that the program wasn't worth its time or cost.

The CBP's Air and Marine Operations (AMO) branch nevertheless soon had a fleet of nine General Atomics Predator B and Guardian drones, three based in Sierra Vista, Arizona; three in Grand Forks, North Dakota; and three in Corpus Christi, Texas. Furthermore, the CBP proposed acquiring 14 additional drones in November 2012 at a cost of $443 million, to be used "to conduct missions in areas that are remote, too rugged for ground access, or otherwise considered too high-risk for manned aircraft or personnel on the ground." CBP drones, flying at altitudes between 19,000 and 28,000 feet, are equipped with an array of sensors that include electro-optical and infrared cameras, allowing operators to collect footage day or night, as well as to track movements of individual cars and boats, plus gather information on the terrain. Yet at their minimum altitude, the CBP claims their sensors are not powerful enough to discern a person's physical characteristics or read a license plate, and they do not feature heat-sensors so as to "see" through walls. Only one is equipped with a Wide Area Surveillance System (WASS) mounted

on its wing, recording an area approximately 3.7 miles wide.

It has been reported that the Mexican government secretly requested special assistance from U.S. intelligence during the summer of 2013 and relaxed its airspace restrictions by providing one-time written consent for an American drone to make overflights into northern Mexico's airspace, helping track the erratic movements out of Nuevo Laredo of the vicious Zeta Cartel leader Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño. Paranoid and fearful, he had taken to traveling fitfully over unpaved rural back-roads in Coahuila and Tamaulipas, accompanied by small escorts. However, once identified by the tireless airborne drone, his silver-gray pickup was spotted at dawn on June 15, 2013, driving across an open expanse 13 miles southwest of Nuevo Laredo near Anáhuac. A Mexican Navy Black Hawk helicopter roared down and forced it to halt, Treviño being easily subdued by *marino* special-forces as he tried to flee into the underbrush.

Cartel Drones (2010–Present)

Drug smugglers in northern Mexico and their distributors on the American side of the border began experimenting in 2010 with smaller, remote-control drones to make quick deliveries of small quantities of expensive narcotics over lonely stretches of border-fence and return with bundles of cash. Over the next two years, such flights would increase notably, the CBP logging 150 sightings in 2012, capable of having conveyed an estimated total of two metric tons of premium drugs. Some cartels have even become so vested in the use of drones—a much less costly expedient than digging "narco tunnels"—that they are now manufacturing larger and more robust models in factories in the Federal District, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Querétaro, and Tijuana, supposedly capable of transporting 60–100 kilo loads. [Prior to 2011, virtually all drones were produced abroad, primarily in Israel or China.]

It is likely that cartel engineers will continue making these trafficking drones even more effective in terms of capacity, range, and methods to avoid detection, as they represent a "nearly perfect drug mule." Operators who pilot rapid flights from one border-city across to its neighbor can simply hover and release cargoes at a predetermined spot, with little danger of arrest—plus drone use is more economical, as a single human drug "mule" can earn as much as $10,000 for one delivery. Even the rare interception of a single drone does not represent a significant financial loss for the smugglers, while they can be employed for other purposes as well: to conduct surveillance; move money or cell-phones or important messages; and gather real-time intelligence.

A typical cross-border drone flight occurred around 11:25 p.m. on August 8, 2017, when a U.S. Border Patrol agent observed one flying over the border fence some two miles west of San Ysidro, California, and alerted nearby colleagues. Fifteen minutes later, another agent patrolling on an all-terrain vehicle spotted a male suspect near the intersection of Servando Avenue and Valentino Street, discovering that this 25-year-old man was holding a large bag with multiple plastic-wrapped packages containing methamphetamines, having concealed a two-foot-tall DJI Matrice 600 drone under a nearby bush. This commercial model (capable of carrying a 33-pound payload) had just brought 13.5 pounds of narcotics worth $46,000 on its nocturnal flight of nearly 2,000 yards out of Mexico.

One of the few countermeasures that the Border Patrol can deploy is the Tethered Aerostat Radar System or "TARS"—a large white surveillance-blimp, six being stationed along the border between Arizona and Texas, carrying specialized radar that can detect small drones or ultra-light aircraft flying too low for conventional radar. Once a suspicious flight is spotted by TARS and its descent suggests that a load is about to be dropped, CBP teams can be in the air to intercept within three minutes; however, the downside is that TARS blimps are easily visible from a long distance, so that smugglers can make their attempt outside of its surveillance cone, while the cumbersome airships can only be repositioned with difficulty.

Yet another use for cartel drones was unveiled at 7:30 a.m. on July 10, 2018: as Gerardo Sosa Olachea—Baja California's public-safety secretary—was preparing to meet with the American consul in Tijuana, he learned that two remote-control drones had attacked one of his unoccupied homes in Tecate's Colonia Los Laureles. The first UAV had been "weaponized" with two improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which did not explode when that craft plummeted into the house's patio; a second drone, which had remained hovering overhead as an observer, fell to earth as well—likely abandoned in midflight when the nearby operators fled to avoid capture. Both UAVs were retrieved by Policía Estatal Preventiva or "Preventive State Police" guards, and sent to be examined by forensic experts.

See also: Tunnels; Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Capture of the Treviño Morales Brothers.

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El Chapo—see "Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo 'El Chapo'"

Encajuelado, encobijado, encintado, entambado—see "Body Disposals"

Ephedrine Intercept (2007).

Revealing capture, one of the earliest successes in President Felipe Calderón's reinvigorated "war against drugs," netting a record seizure of illegal proceeds.

Background (December 2006–February 2007)

Having won the presidency by only the narrowest of margins, Calderón—a mild-mannered political moderate—began his six-year mandate with a robust military campaign directed against the cartels, as a means of imbuing his administration with an aura of strength and purpose. On his very first day in office on December 1, 2006, he signed a bill increasing the armed forces' and Federal Police pay, then ordered them to prepare to deploy contingents into troubled areas around the country.

One of the very earliest strikes which these federal agencies would make, occurred when operatives from the Attorney-General's Ministerio Público Federal seized 849 barrels containing 19.7 tons of hydroxy-benzil-N-methyl-acetetamine or "pseudo-ephedrine" worth $692,895 in Michoacán's port-city of Lázaro Cárdenas on December 5, 2006, three weeks after this cargo had arrived from the Chinese port of Xingang or Tianjin aboard the British-registered container ship *Dalton*. The capture of such a massive quantity of a product typically prescribed in tiny dosages as a nasal decongestant, gave the authorities sufficient leads to close down a clandestine lab intended to convert these chemicals into crystal methamphetamine in the hamlet of Cheranguerán on the Uruapan-to-Carápan highway, as well as leading agents to the home of this huge consignment's importer in Mexico City.

Operation "Dragón" (March 2007)

Dozens of heavily-armed Policía Federal agents of the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) disgorged from a column of vehicles on the afternoon of March 15, 2007, to raid the residence of an immigrant originally from Shanghai named Zhenli Ye Gon—who had obtained his Mexican citizenship in 2002, five years after founding a company named Unimed Pharm Chem de Mexico, S.A. de C.V., as a front for his drug-manufacturing enterprise. It would turn out that Ye Gon had already imported 33.8 tons of ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine between February 2003 and July 2005, bought from Chifeng Arker Pharmaceutical Technology, a subsidiary of Shanghai Industrial United Holdings, whose factory was in the remote interior of Mongolia near the Russian border. The increased methamphetamine output generated by Ye Gon's imports had at first been distributed by the Milenio Cartel, before being passed over to the Sinaloa Cartel's *plaza*-boss in Guadalajara, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal—earning him a fortune and the nickname "Ice King" or "King of Crystal."

Storming into Ye Gon's opulent mansion at Sierra Madre 515 in the wealthy Colonia Lomas de Chapultepec district of Mexico City, the agents detained seven people inside, but the suspect himself was absent, so they placed his wife of 17 years—Tamoiyi "Yiyi" Marx Yu—under *arraigo* or "preventive detention" and began searching the vast dwelling. Behind its master bedroom, they discovered a mirror-lined dressing room and pried it open to reveal a windowless secret room that contained dozens of suitcases stuffed with $100 bills. Other similar caches were uncovered throughout the house, so that when the PGR agents gathered them and counted up the cash by nightfall, they had secured a staggering $207.5 million, 17.3 million Mexican pesos, 201,000 European euros, 113,000 Hong Kong dollars, $20,000 in travelers' checks, 11 pure-gold bullion coins, high-end jewelry, plus a gold-plated AK-47 and a half-dozen other expensive semiautomatic pistols.

But Ye Gon himself did not appear, instead using a Chinese passport to flee into the United States with the supposed intent of seeking political asylum. However, he had not yet applied when he was arrested four months later on the evening of July 24, 2007, dining with a lawyer friend at an Asian restaurant near Silver Spring in the Beltway of Maryland outside Washington, DC. Initially jailed in Virginia and charged with illegally importing about 86 metric tons of restricted chemicals into Mexico "for the express purpose of manufacturing

pseudoephedrine/ephedrine"—chemicals that can be used to manufacture methamphetamines—as well as money laundering by deliberately losing huge sums of cartel money playing baccarat in Las Vegas.

That city's Sand Corporation Inc. would subsequently agree to pay a $47 million fine to the American government for failing to report Ye Gon's massive losses, while the British banking giant HSBC also reached a $1.9 billion settlement in 2012, after admitting that its poor controls had allowed Mexican cartels "to launder at least $881 million." Ye Gon, however, proved impossible to convict in any American court, and so was extradited to Mexico's maximum-security Altiplano Penitentiary on October 18, 2016, to begin a futile legal action in hopes of recuperating his fortune from the Mexican government.

See also: Colima Cartel; Methamphetamines; Milenio Cartel.

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What do you do in a city like this? You keep quiet.

—anonymous lawyer in Matamoros, Tamaulipas (February 1996)

Familia Michoacana Cartel (2006–2012). Peculiar organization that began as a populist self-defense group, becoming involved in drug trafficking and eventually led by a mad leader known as *El Más Loco* or "the Craziest One."

Background (1980s–2005)

Michoacán's aptly-named *Tierra Caliente* or "Hot Lands" region is so dry and infertile that few Spaniards settled there during the colonial era. Many regional tribes have therefore survived into the modern era with their ancient dialects and societal customs relatively intact, despite being often exploited as cheap, expendable labor by outsiders, landowners, and the government. Analysts believe that La Familia Michoacana's early incarnation was as a vigilante group, interceding on behalf of peasants threatened by bulk narcotics-buyers or other criminals as large-scale marijuana and poppy cultivation spread throughout the state during the 1980s. From protecting natives against the extortions, kidnappings, and murders by abusive purchasers, this secretive Familia paramilitary next started to act as intermediaries for drug deals during the 1990s—representing the interests of impoverished growers who were in desperate need of money, but afraid to negotiate on their own. (Years later, their spiritual leader, Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno González, would explain that La Familia had taken control of the local drug-trade because "what we want to do is regulate it, so that the people are not exploited.")

During this early phase, Moreno is believed to have been working as a migrant in Palo Alto, Fresno, and San Jose, California, for several years; he also reportedly smuggled marijuana across the Tamaulipas border and was once arrested in McAllen, Texas, before returning to Michoacán. A devout evangelical, he would apparently be inspired by the American Christian writer John Eldredge's 2001 book, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*, as well as the religious fundamentalist Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez and motivational speaker Miguel Ángel Cornejo.

When an independent regional dealer named Carlos Alberto "El Tísico" Rosales Mendoza had a falling-out with Michoacán's dominant Milenio Cartel late that same year, he forged an alliance with the distant Gulf Cartel and their fearsome Zeta paramilitary force, and persuaded "El Chayo" Moreno and his Familia faction (as well as José de Jesús "El Chango" Méndez Vargas' group) to join his syndicate and fight for a share of the business. La Familia *sicarios* proved valuable allies to Zeta hit-squads prowling the state as of the summer of 2003, murdering Milenio Cartel members, in turn receiving training and arms, as well as learning the Zetas' cruel psy-ops terror tactics, even after "El Tísico" Rosales was arrested in October 2004.

Although details remain shrouded in mystery, it is known that Moreno was meanwhile developing a cult-like following within his organization, members being required to study a book of his quasi-spiritual writings entitled *Pensamientos* or "Thoughts." The odd philosophy propagated among his simple followers by the self-taught Chayo would soon gain him the nickname of El Más Loco or "the Craziest One" from outsiders. His adherents nonetheless remained unwaveringly loyal, their movement impenetrable to infiltrators or informers, while narcotic exports rose. When the Sinaloa Cartel of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán sought to wrest Michoacán's strategic Lázaro Cárdenas seaport from the faltering Tijuana Cartel, and the Gulf Cartel's Zetas moved in to likewise profit from this contest in 2006, La Familia prepared to repulse any occupation within their territory by becoming an independent force.

Gruesome Unveiling (September 2006)

La Familia Michoacana or "LFM" first went public as an autonomous cartel at 1:30 a.m. on the night of September 6–7, 2006, when a gray pickup and two olive-green Jeeps carrying about 20 heavily-armed, masked gunmen in black uniforms arrived outside the Sol y Sombra bar in Uruapan's Colonia Bella Vista, pushing inside to shoot into the ceiling above its dance floor and spill the heads of five local dealers out of plastic bags, accompanied by a written message:

> *The Family doesn't kill for money. It doesn't kill women. It doesn't kill the innocent, only those who deserve to die. May all people know, this is: divine justice.*

Bloody fighting ensued, mostly directed against La Familia's former Zeta allies, unleashing a wave of unfettered violence.

With 500 unsolved murders and more inflicted every day, newly-installed President Felipe Calderón—a well-to-do *michoacano* born in its state capital of Morelia—dispatched 4,200 soldiers and 1,000 *marinos* into his native state one week after his inauguration, who encamped at Apatzingán on December 8, 2006. Yet despite some minor arrests, this effort proved futile, La Familia instead reaching an accommodation with the Sinaloans to jointly expel the Zetas, helping the secretive sect to lay claim to Lázaro Cárdenas and expand into the adjoining state of Guerrero, while dominating local narcotics-production from its inaccessible rural hideouts. Some measure of the new cartel's confidence was displayed a few days after Michoacán's municipal elections on November 11, 2007, when 14 newly elected small-town mayors were summoned to a meeting with La Familia's leaders, who demanded payment for the millions that they had invested into these politicians' winning campaigns. The populist movement's income would also be substantially engorged by extortions from local businesses, at their peak imposing "protection fees" on an estimated 85 percent of all legal commerce in Michoacán.

The emergent Familia Cartel nevertheless had a dual personality, its thousands of poor, illiterate rural followers being led by extremely wealthy drug-bosses living in big-city mansions. Its populist element was appeased by acts of "resistance" against the distrusted government, such as when La Familia repeatedly threatened state officials with disrupting the Independence Day celebrations on September 15, 2008—warnings that went unheeded, until grenades were lobbed into Morelia's crowded main square on that day, killing eight people and injuring more than 100. In contrast, 400

Federal Police agents raided an extravagantly expensive christening in Morelia on April 20, 2009, for a granddaughter born to Rafael Cedeño Hernández, one of 44 detainees—a former state prosecutorial agent who had become La Familia's *brazo derecho* or second-in-command, in charge of its Lázaro Cárdenas *plaza* and four municipalities in Guerrero, as well as with indoctrinating new recruits into the cartel's religious values, morals, and ethics. (He would claim to have inducted 8,000 new members in 2008 alone.)

In an effort to cripple its pernicious influence, Army and Federal Police detachments arrested 35 state and municipal authorities (including a judge) in a coordinated sweep across Michoacán on May 26, 2009, on suspected organized-crime ties—although all but one would eventually have to be released for lack of witnesses or evidence. La Familia's strength was on full display when another cartel lieutenant—Arnoldo Rueda Medina—was arrested while arriving at his luxurious Morelia home on July 11, 2009, sparking an almost immediate counterassault by more than two-dozen Familia gunmen tossing fragmentation grenades and firing high-powered weaponry at the Federal Police station where he was taken.

Rueda was nevertheless carried off toward Mexico City shortly thereafter by a host of soldiers and police, but heavily-armed *sicarios* meanwhile continued ambushing federal agents and attacking police-stations throughout western Michoacán, as well as in Guerrero and Guanajuato. They would even assail the hotels where agents were lodged in six different cities, two soldiers and five federal policemen being killed that day, another ten wounded. Two days later, a bus carrying off-duty federal agents investigating unrelated crimes was intercepted, 11 men and one woman being tortured and murdered, their bodies dumped along a mountain highway with a written message: "We will be waiting for you here." [Ten municipal police officers would later be arrested for complicity in these slayings.]

President Calderón responded by dispatching 1,000 more Federal Police officers into the state, tripling their numbers—yet angering Michoacán's Governor Leonel Godoy Rangel, who called it "an occupation" and complained that he had not been consulted. In a live television interview on July 16, 2009, Servando "La Tuta" Gómez Martínez—who identified himself as the cartel's "chief-of-operations"—asserted that "La Familia was created to look after the interests of our people and our family," adding that the group was "a necessary evil." When the TV moderator interrupted to ask what La Familia really wanted, La Tuta replied: "The only thing we want is peace and tranquility"—yet hardly surprisingly, the federal government rejected any calls for a dialogue.

Handicapped by their lack of direct cross-border access in northern Mexico, requiring them to negotiate with rival cartels to ship their methamphetamines and other illicit products through their territories into the U.S. market, La Familia's top lieutenant Jesús "El Chango" Méndez set up an advance base in early 2010 in the tiny border-town of La Rumorosa between Mexicali and Tecate, Baja California, in hopes of carving out a foothold. La Familia Michoacana also entered into an unexpected alliance after the Gulf Cartel leader Tony Tormenta was killed in a massive shootout in Matamoros on November 5, 2010, his hard-pressed surviving partner Jorge Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla Sánchez asking to form a Nueva Federación with the *michoacanos*, thereby securing squads of Familia

gunmen to act as reinforcements in Tamaulipas.

A rural *fiesta* in the mountain range near Apatzingán was then surprised by a column of Policía Federal officers on December 9, 2010, a violent three-hour shootout ensuing during which five policemen, three residents, and three Familia members were killed. Subsequent interrogations of survivors suggested that the crackpot Familia spiritual leader Nazario "El Más Loco" Moreno had also been killed, his body carried off by loyal adherents—an uncorroborated claim that President Felipe Calderón's administration triumphantly announced three days later, apparently signaling the cartel's disbandment.

Reincarnation as Knights Templar (2011–2013)

But after splitting with certain disgruntled cells, Servando "La Tuta" Gómez and Enrique "El Kike" Plancarte Solís resurrected another cartel on March 8, 2011—41st birthday of the supposedly dead Nazario Moreno—called the *Caballeros Templarios* or "Knights Templar." The name of this medieval military-religious order, charged with aiding pilgrims on their journeys through the Holy Land and renowned for piety and fearlessness on the battlefield, was deliberately chosen to convince the modern group's peasant adherents that they were champions in the fight against "materialism, injustice, and tyranny." Claiming to be guided by a pseudo-religious code that included the maxim "The Knights Templar will face an ideological battle that will challenge us to defend the values that sustain a society based on ethics," their "Code of Ethics" consisted of 50 articles: its first being that members joined "for life, without exceptions," desertions or withdrawals being punishable by death. Converts even wore Roman-style helmets during their induction ceremonies.

Narcomantas or "narco banners" posted throughout Michoacán declared that the Templarios would be carrying on the "altruistic activities that were previously done by La Familia Michoacana," and in keeping with their newfound sanctity, they even arranged a cease-fire before Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Mexico in March 2012. However, the Knights' other practices had also remained the same: they defeated any Familia holdovers, driving them out of Michoacán, while they themselves started expanding into Guanajuato, Guerrero, the Estado de México, and the outskirts of Mexico City, gaining thousands more converts. Nazario Moreno continued to preach his eccentric philosophy in rural villages, leaving the drug business to "La Tuta" Gómez and "El Kike" Plancarte, who resumed extortions of local businesses and attempts to find more profitable means of smuggling their cartel's cocaine and methamphetamines through Baja California or Tamaulipas into the United States.

The Templars' path was barred by the emergence of Jalisco Nueva Generación, which pushed into Colima, northern Michoacán, and Guanajuato as of early 2012, soon spanning from coast to coast. Having only about 600 armed *sicarios*, the Knights were not strong enough to secure a corridor through this rival's territory, and their grip on their native state also started to weaken as revenues sagged. By August 2013, both federal and state authorities were attributing most of the violence in Michoacán to the Knights' escalating shakedowns of businessmen, middle-class citizens, and even some nonaligned peasant groups to compensate for their dwindling income. Numerous *autodefensa* or "self-defense" units were raised in such troubled districts

as Aguila, leading "La Tuta" Gómez to (falsely) charge in posted videos that such groups were affiliated with the Zetas, and complaining that the Policía Federal were deliberately encouraging more to be formed so as to contain and debilitate his struggling *templarios*. A breakaway cell even invoked the old Familia Michoacana name by establishing a Nueva Familia organization in January 2014, which failed to take root.

Second Death of "El Más Loco" (March 2014)

Calderón's administration had been embarrassed by its mistaken claim of having killed Nazario Moreno in December 2010, disproved by numerous subsequent sightings of this crackpot espousing his evermore eccentric Templar philosophy among his rural followers. Eager to rectify this error, which had bolstered the renegade's prestige, the authorities got a break when they caught one of Moreno's top financial operatives on February 7, 2014, and through interrogations and intelligence analysis were able to narrow down "El Más Loco's" general position and anticipated future movements.

An operation codenamed Lince or "Lynx" was set in motion at the beginning of that next month, when hundreds of soldiers began redeploying around Michoacán to set up scores of roadblocks, effectively cutting off vehicular traffic and encircling the rural municipalities of Apatzingán, Zicuirán, Aguililla, Arteaga, and Tumbiscatío. An elite force of 53 *marinos* then moved up into its mountains and nearly caught their elusive prey on March 3, 2014, although they did uncover a huge cache of weaponry and explosives next day, which they seized. A cave serving as a Knights jungle-hideout was reached by March 6, 2014, but found to be empty; however, a radio left behind in one of their Toyota Tacoma pickups was still active, so that by listening in on the Knights Templar frequency, the *marinos* overheard several members discussing where a grand *fiesta* was to be held to celebrate Moreno's 44th birthday on March 8.

Proceeding toward that remote locale outside Tumbiscatío, the naval special-forces closed in on their objective at 4:30 a.m. on Sunday, March 9, 2014, hoping to catch the Knights Templar and their leader still sleeping off the previous night's revels. At 7:00 a.m., while passing the kilometer 13 marker along Tumbiscatío's Municipal Highway, they spotted a lone rider approaching on a mule, who opened fire as soon as he sighted the *marinos*. Special-forces marksmen promptly killed this lone gunman, who would be revealed by fingerprint comparisons against Moreno's old military-service records as the cartel leader. The *marinos* nevertheless carried his body back out of the jungle for further corroborative forensic tests and eyewitness identifications.

Aftermath (2014–2015)

The death of their longtime spiritual figurehead marked an end to the Templarios, their leadership continuing to suffer further losses when underboss Samuel Díaz Benítez was captured by Policía Federal agents at Las Tinajas in the municipality of Apatzingán on March 29, 2014, while the cartel's second-in-command, Enrique "Kike" Plancarte, was run down by 200 naval special-forces and two helicopters in a day-long pursuit through the municipality of Colón, Querétaro, before finally being cornered and killed with seven gunshots on the afternoon of March 31, 2014.

Even "La Tuta" Gómez was arrested by the Federal Police on February 27, 2015,

along with numerous associates, while many cartel properties were confiscated by the authorities. In December 2015, the body of 52-year-old "El Tísico" Rosales—released after completing a ten-year prison sentence—was discovered along with three other corpses in a car parked near a highway tollbooth in western Michoacán, forensic experts determining that all four had been tortured and shot to death elsewhere, before their remains were dumped.

See also: Aguacates, Cártel de los; Infantería de Marina; Milenio Cartel.

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FEADS (1997–2003). *Fiscalía Especializada para Atención a los Delitos contra la Salud* or "Specialized Prosecutor's Office Regarding Crimes against Public Health," a subsection of the Federal Attorney-General's Office (PGR) until it was closed down for corruption.

Resurrection of a Tainted Institution (1996–1997)

The Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas in January 1994 surprised and shook Mexico's government. Years of PRI neglect had left many of its institutions incapable of guarding the borders, gathering intelligence, combating organized-crime, preventing arms imports, investigating bank transactions, collecting taxes, etc., so that it was feared the country had become vulnerable to hostile foreign forces. A secret overhaul was therefore initiated by President Ernesto Zedillo's administration, which—in addition to a major military upgrade—ordered that every essential government department be reformed and reinvigorated, so as to contribute toward a national campaign aimed at tightening up external security. This effort was codenamed Operación "Sellamiento" or "Seal," because its top priority was to reimpose discipline along the borders, especially in the south so as to prevent money and weapons from reaching the Zapatista rebels in their jungle camps.

As part of Zedillo's reforms, he named the lawyer Jorge Madrazo Cuéllar as new *procurador general* or "attorney-general" as of December 2, 1996, who promptly began to clean out the compromised PGR by bringing in hundreds of Army officers to replace suspect employees in key positions. Major-General Guillermo Álvarez Nara, for example, was appointed director-general of its Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police," while Lieutenant-Colonel Juan Edgardo Cedillo González became director of its *Antidrogas* or "Antinarcotics" Division, and hundreds more soldiers would be transferred from their regular duties to serve at various lower levels.

One of the crucial PGR subdivisions was its anti-narcotics prosecutorial branch, which was suspended in disgrace shortly thereafter because of the embarrassing arrest of Mexico's drug-czar General José de Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo on February 18, 1997, for colluding with the Juárez Cartel. The civilian attorney Mariano Herrán Salvatti was shifted over from one of Mexico City's law-enforcement agencies one month later, to rebuild Gutiérrez Rebollo's discredited Instituto Nacional Contra las Drogas or "National Anti-narcotics Institute" (INCD). He began by vetting every existing employee and prospective recruit as of mid-March 1997, in the process renaming this branch FEADS.

Under Mexican law, mere possession of a controlled substance was sufficient grounds for immediate detention on a charge of committing "a crime against public health," a highly-effective courtroom tool against dealers. [The successful defense-attorney Alberto "La Chona" Gómez Gómez, for instance, dealt exclusively in "prosecutions for crimes against public health" in the district courts of Monterrey, Nuevo León—until he was abducted off a Reynosa street in late October 2000, never to be seen again.] However, a U.S. congressional report dated September 1997 stated that the capabilities of this reviving unit still remained:

> *. . . limited by the small number of personnel who have been fully vetted. According to Herrán Salvatti, as of August 25,* [1997] *only 282 prospective employees had passed the polygraph phase of the vetting process; the organization's projected strength is 2,000 agents.*

It was this manpower shortfall that caused Herrán and Attorney-General Madrazo to request that soldiers from the Army's High Command Special-Forces Airmobile Group (GAFE) be temporarily reassigned to serve as FEADS field-agents, so as to sustain this agency's drug-fighting capabilities until more civilian personnel could be hired.

Secondment of Military Replacements (1997–2000)

Some 1,000 soldiers—650 of them newly-minted GAFEs—were discreetly transferred from the Army in the spring of 1997 to become deputized as federal *judiciales* or "judicial policemen," about 350 being dispatched north to operate as FEADS agents out of Reynosa, with orders to infiltrate drug-smuggling operations along the Tamaulipas-Texas border. In accordance with standard PGR field-practice, each undercover operative was assigned a code number to contact his superiors, consisting of the double letter "ZZ" followed by successive numerals: ZZ-1, ZZ-2, etc. Years later, one participant named Mateo Díaz López would describe his assignment as follows [PGR/SIEDO/UIEDCS/122/2006]:

> *I was commissioned to carry out intelligence work related to the activities being*

> *conducted by said suspects, such as whether they were spending in American dollars, or driving stolen cars, or setting up tiendas or "stores"* [*i.e.*, street-level retail drug outlets], *or if they had any ongoing jales or "jobs," with the aim of establishing whether they were mixed up in anything bad and reporting on it.*

Another like-sized contingent of supplementary FEADS field-agents was sent to the southern border opposite Guatemala and Belize, while a 100-man detachment would be deployed into Chihuahua as of February 24, 1998, to conduct Operativo "Arpón" or Operation "Harpoon" under Lieutenant-Colonel Juan Figueroa Vargas [who "arrived supported by dozens of military intelligence officers," according to a contemporary newspaper account, but after ineffectually searching for drug stashhouses, weapons, and cartel bosses, they retired—having merely secured eight empty dwellings with the help of state and municipal police officers].

Eventually, the last 100 GAFEs were returned to their regular military duties in early December 2000, more than half accepting honorable discharges and severance pay from the Army. But some months later, intelligence officers at the Eighth Military Zone headquarters in Reynosa began noticing several of their names reappearing in the service of an emergent new criminal gang along the Frontera Chica between Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Miguel Alemán, calling themselves the Zetas. [For greater details, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003)."]

Decline (2001–2002)

During the three short years that Herrán ran FEADS, it too became mired in scandals. Shortly after leaving his post in November 2000—just before the inauguration of a new PAN administration under Vicente Fox—the daily *El Universal* reported that German diplomats in Mexico City had accused Herrán and two of his subordinates of embezzling $750,000 that their embassy had donated to FEADS to purchase "interception equipment" against drug traffickers, although the equipment that they claimed to have bought proved to be worn out and obviously secondhand.

FEADS' new director, Mario Estuardo Bermúdez Molina, tried to give a positive impression during his first six months in office under Attorney-General Rafael Macedo de la Concha by claiming that his agency had located and eradicated 5,334 *plantíos* or "plantings" of marijuana and poppies throughout Mexico, thanks to reconnaissance flights made by 592 agents aboard a fleet of 114 light aircraft in Oaxaca, Guerrero, Jalisco, Durango, Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, Morelos, Chiapas, and the Federal District. Nevertheless, by August 2001 it was already being suggested that the errant FEADS should be melded with the Unidad Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Organized-Crime Unit" (UEDO) and Unidad Especializada contra el Lavado de Dinero or "Specialized Anti-Money Laundering Unit" (UELD) into a single entity.

Disbandment and Substitution (January 2003)

FEADS was finally undone when a 28th Infantry Battalion platoon—acting on an anonymous tip about armed men seen around the kilometer 46.5 marker of the Rosarito-to-Ensenada highway—arrived and seized a two-ton marijuana shipment on the night of January 3, 2003, at the Primo Tapia *ejido* or "communal farm" in the municipality of Playas de Rosarito, Baja California. One of the traffickers assured his captors that "he had everything arranged

with the municipal police *comandante*," and offered a $200,000 bribe to First Captain Eduardo Navarrete and his nine 28th Battalion soldiers to be released along with his cargo. When the officer refused, a stream of corrupt officials (including FEADS agents) began arriving in the early hours of Saturday morning from nearby Tijuana, to intercede on the smugglers' behalf—all being detained by the soldiers.

After the captain reported this incident to his military superiors and to the Ministerio Público Federal in Tijuana, a raid was launched on the FEADS offices in the Otay district by 28th Battalion troops and other PGR agents on the afternoon of Friday, January 10, 2003—discovering that another five tons of drugs and two more dealers were being held, while a ransom of $2–3 million was negotiated for their release. The half-dozen implicated FEADS agents were immediately detained, while another 15 deserted shortly thereafter, for whom arrest warrants were subsequently issued. The *WOLA Drug War Monitor* reported in its April 2003 edition how:

> *On January 10, 2003, the Army stormed the FEADS Tijuana office, detaining six agents and one administrative staff-member, who were subsequently charged with extorting drug-traffickers. The following week, the Army closed down FEADS offices across the country, in order to investigate whether additional agents were also involved in drug corruption.*

In Mazatlán, its FEADS office was emptied and all furnishings trucked away by Monday night, January 20, 2003, while 100 AFI agents stationed in Culiacán were subjected to narcotics testing. Eventually, FEADS' duties were taken over by the Subprocuraduría de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Deputy Attorney-General's Office for Specialized Organized-Crime Investigations" (SIEDO), founded with 117 exhaustively-vetted holdover FEADS agents in August 2003.

See also: GAFE; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto; Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003).

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Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel (1946–Present).

Pioneer cocaine-trafficker and Guadalajara Cartel co-founder, who also laid out the territorial boundaries still largely observed by syndicates today.

Birth and Early Education (1946–1966)

Born on a ranch at Bellavista in the *comisaría* of Culiacáncito, an impoverished Sinaloan town with unpaved roads three miles outside Culiacán, on January 8, 1946, he was one of nine children of Ramón Félix—originally from Guamúchil—and Justina "Tina" Gallardo Gastelum from Aguapepe, who worked hard on the shabby *hacienda* or "estate" of Don Chuy Tamayo until they were able to save up enough money to buy its main house and part of its

surrounding lands. Unlike most of his future drug-trafficking peers, young Miguel Ángel would be well educated, becoming an avid lifelong reader who would obtain his diploma from Culiacán's Universidad preparatory high-school, before studying toward a business degree at that city's Webster College. [Decades later, Félix Gallardo would even finance the erection of a large library at Sinaloa's State University.]

Yet even as a teenager, the ambitious young Félix Gallardo proved an energetic itinerant salesman, riding his bicycle to nearby farming communities to sell an assortment of city-bought goods such as bolts of cloth, threads, needles, and buttons—often willing to receive chickens or cheeses or sausages by way of payment, which he then sold at a profit in Culiacán. He owned a small tire-business at Bellavista as a young man, before suddenly joining the Sinaloa State Policía Judicial at the age of 20 in 1966. It would later be said that he "lived in a humble part of town called Tierra Blanca when he first arrived in Culiacán from the countryside," yet because of his polished language and manners, he was soon assigned to serve as a state police bodyguard in the household of then-Governor Leopoldo Sánchez Celis, looking after the children of this venal political boss and becoming involved with some of his shadier associates. Governor Sánchez Celis would later act as *padrino* or "godfather" when his young subordinate married María Elvira Murillo, with whom Félix Gallardo would eventually sire 17 children.

Early Drug Career and Inconspicuous Rise (1966–1974)

Another of Governor Sánchez Celis's police bodyguards was 28-year-old Pedro Avilés Peréz of Badiraguato, Sinaloa, a drug smuggler who introduced his younger colleague into the trade—which proved especially fruitful for both officers, after the crooked governor's term expired in 1968, leaving them unemployed in any official capacity. However, at first acting as a *madrina* ["nursemaid" or henchman for other policemen involved in criminal acts, such as holding or beating kidnap-victims], Félix Gallardo soon came into contact with heroin trafficker Eduardo "Lalo" Fernández and began employing a variety of small-time criminals and groups to ship marijuana and other opiates into the United States—easy and financially-rewarding work for the charismatic young former state policeman.

It helped that shortly thereafter, he was able to establish another beneficial relationship with Sinaloa's new governor, Alfredo Valdés Montoya (1969–1974), which allowed him to further expand his networking and illicit dealings—as well as ignore the first indictment handed down against him in 1971, for "crimes against public health" (i.e., drug trafficking). Félix Gallardo remained unconcerned, despite 14 more such arrest-warrants issued against his name over the next five years, a biographer later describing him as "the most sought-after and least pursued man in northwestern Mexico." Passing himself off as a well-to-do entrepreneur and cattle broker, Félix Gallardo continued to profit from traveling through Sinaloa and Jalisco arranging shipments of marijuana and heroin with his local collaborators.

Initial Colombian Contacts (1975–1977)

The first hints of Félix Gallardo's clandestine drug-trafficking wouldn't come to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's attention until late 1975, when an intelligence report indicated that he had been seen consorting

with Juan Ramón Matta Ballesteros, a Honduran chemist known for dealing with Colombian cocaine-traffickers in Miami and Medellín. However, as an energetic entrepreneur, such a transitory association might have been perfectly normal—Félix Gallardo now being so prosperous as to found his own real-estate agency in 1976 called Immobiliaria Delia (through which he covertly laundered drug profits, by buying up ever-more properties). He had soon acquired two-dozen holdings, and was listed in Culiacán's *Registro Público* or "Public Register" as a successful businessman who lived with his family in the Colonia Las Quintas suburb and often appeared in society pages of both that city and Guadalajara. Félix Gallardo furthermore became a major shareholder with a seat on the board of his local Banco Mexicano Somex branch, through which he routinely funneled millions of dollars in transactions.

But in fact, Félix Gallardo was angling for much greater rewards through an introduction to the Medellín Cartel from Matta Ballesteros, which became possible after Alberto Sicilia Falcón—a flamboyantly bisexual Cuban-born international drug-broker with contacts in Colombia—was apprehended in Mexico City in July 1975. After a few months' internment in Lecumberri Penitentiary, this multimillionaire escaped by a tunnel in April 1976, only to be recaptured on May 2. The DEA assembled an ad hoc "Central Tactical" team in June 1976 codenamed "CENTAC 12," which in conjunction with the Policía Judicial Federal set about dismantling Sicilia Falcón's operations. Like other competing dealers, Félix Gallardo hoped to use his longstanding relationship with Mexican officials to take over at least some of the smuggling routes being lost by the imprisoned Sicilia Falcón, thereby gaining his own direct connection to the Colombians.

The launch of an aerial-spraying campaign that same year against narcotic crops in northern Mexico codenamed Operación "Trizo" (precursor to the much larger Operación "Cóndor" in 1977) was already exposing the impracticalities of relying on large cash-crops of marijuana whose:

- bright-green foliage was easy to spot from the air in such arid landscapes, and vulnerable to eradication by crop-dusting government aircraft spraying clouds of herbicides; while
- the cultivation, harvesting, refinement, and storage of their voluminous harvests was also becoming increasingly difficult to conceal from Army patrols on the ground; plus
- the smuggling of such bulky, redolent cargoes past customs agents with sniffer dogs into the United States was growing progressively harder; and
- all of this labor-intensive work was rewarded by a relatively low profit-margins on marijuana and coarse heroin.

Handling small, compact packages of very high-value Colombian cocaine promised to be much more lucrative. [For further details on this joint U.S.-Mexico aerial-eradication campaign, see "'Condor,' Operation."]

In order to persuade the Colombian cartel-bosses to trust his ability to safely usher their shipments through Mexico, Félix Gallardo began purchasing increasingly large amounts of cocaine through Matta Ballesteros. One such transaction in early February 1977 (the month after Operation Condor had been launched with great fanfare in Culiacán) almost proved to be his undoing: the DEA field-office in San Diego received an intelligence report indicating that a bulk shipment of 300 kilos of Colombian cocaine had just reached Culiacán, half

of which was being flown on to Tijuana aboard a private plane. The U.S. agents persuaded their Mexican counterparts to intercept this aircraft at Tijuana's airport—and when they did so, a then-record seizure of 141 kilos of Colombian cocaine and ten kilos of Mexican heroin resulted.

Félix Gallardo was shaken by this exposure and immediately took steps to remove himself from the scene by relocating his principal residence from Culiacán to Guadalajara that same year of 1977. [He would also appear before an accommodating Baja California judge four years later, to be retroactively absolved of any charges regarding this intercepted consignment; but it would take the DEA a couple more years of investigating before finally realizing that this smuggling attempt had in fact been orchestrated by Félix Gallardo, so that as late as 1979 its records would still only describe him as "an intermediary specializing in transportation, suspected of carrying out large-scale deliveries of cocaine to Arizona and Los Angeles."]

Matta Ballesteros at last succeeded in introducing Félix Gallardo to the major Colombian supplier Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha—nicknamed "El Mexicano" because of his love of all things Mexican—when a meeting to discuss a possible trans-shipment agreement was set for late 1977, which Félix Gallardo hosted at his splendid beach-house at Altata, less than an hour's drive outside Culiacán. He spared no expense and lavished great care on every detail so as to stage an unforgettable pageant for his guest from Medellín, including mariachi bands; a full-scale *charreada* or "rodeo" featuring riding and roping skills by magnificently-mounted cowboys or *charros*; and a lavish banquet featuring scores of tasty traditional dishes and drinks from every corner of the country, served by beautiful women.

El Mexicano was delighted by this spectacle, which helped to seal the deal. The Colombians had already been inclined to reassign the flamboyant Sicilia Falcón's drug-routes to Félix Gallardo, finding him:

- a much more low-profile and better-connected working partner than the imprisoned Cuban gadfly, who had drawn altogether too much attention to their clandestine business;
- an experienced trafficker who was already successfully running large cargoes through his "archipelago of contacts" in Sonora and Baja California, across the border into the United States;
- and whose northwestern distribution-network led into an entirely new market—California, Arizona, Nevada, Texas—for the Colombians, who until then had been largely confined to the Eastern Seaboard from Florida up to New York.

The resultant agreement called for Rodríguez Gacha's smugglers to deposit consignments in Mexico, where Félix Gallardo's operatives would take over and transport this cocaine across country and into the United States, in return for a 25–30 percent commission. In short order, his organization would be handling between a ton-and-a-half to two tons of cocaine every month, receiving handsome returns in comparison with the lowly profits made from marijuana or low-grade heroin.

Creation of the Guadalajara Cartel (1978–1981)

The ongoing Operación "Cóndor" had meanwhile started an exodus of drug-bosses into Guadalajara, which accelerated after the legendary trafficker Pedro Avilés Pérez—widely known as the *León de la*

Sierra or "Lion of the Mountains"—was intercepted and executed by soldiers on Culiacán's outskirts on the night of September 15, 1978. The killing of such a wily, well-connected operator spread alarm among the bosses, so that most had purchased villas and permanently relocated their families into Jalisco's capital by the end of that same year. The Colombians' need for transit-partners surged shortly thereafter, after Washington's interest in its Mexican eradication-efforts waned, instead becoming more preoccupied as of late 1978 with the tons of addictive cocaine flowing into Florida from Medellín, representing a much greater public-health threat.

The subsequent redirection of more and more Colombian loads through Mexico as of 1979, coupled with a resurgence in local marijuana and heroin production following the Americans' withdrawal, would lead to a trafficking boom. In order to minimize frictions so that all might prosper, Félix Gallardo, along with Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Rafael Caro Quintero, created an informal coalition to manage movements through multiple gang-territories, drawing in other bosses so as to better regulate the trade. The name "Guadalajara Cartel" was not immediately adopted, as all founding members retained command over their respective groups. Félix Gallardo—regarded as *padrino* or "godfather" because of his great wealth and direct access to Colombian suppliers—encouraged junior partners to help one another and respect boundaries, working out any difficulties as a "family" so as to avoid attracting unwanted attention from the authorities.

Investigation (1982–1984)

Early in 1982, a five-man DEA team headquartered in the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara launched Operation "Godfather"—a complex investigation intended to gather intelligence about the smuggling operations being furtively directed by the untouchable *padrino* Félix Gallardo, who to all outward appearances remained a successful businessman with investments in real estate, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, cattle-ranches, etc., and friend of Sinaloa's new governor, Antonio Toledo Corro, often mentioned in society pages. [For example, Félix Gallardo and his wife were featured in the May 30, 1983, edition of *El Sol de Sinaloa* newspaper as godparents at the wedding presided over by auxiliary Bishop Humberto Velázquez in Sagrada Familia Church, between Rodolfo Sánchez Duarte—son of former Governor Sánchez Celis—and Theolenda López Urrutia.]

Although unsuccessful in penetrating Félix Gallardo's cover, the energetic and venturesome DEA agent Enrique Camarena nonetheless spent the next couple of years unmasking major marijuana-plantations being financed near the U.S. border by Caro Quintero and his consortium of Guadalajara Cartel co-investors, which were already much more massive than anyone realized in Washington DC. When one such costly marijuana-grow near Fresnillo, Zacatecas, was destroyed by a government raid on May 28, 1984, followed by a second much larger one at Búfalo in southern Chihuahua on November 9, 1984, an enraged Caro Quintero demanded to know which agent had produced these intelligence coups. Félix Gallardo was present at the first meeting of his Guadalajara Cartel junior partners at which this matter was discussed, as well as the last one in late January 1985 that identified Camarena and proposed his abduction. [A photo of this DEA agent, apparently taken in the Federal Judicial Police headquarters in Guadalajara, would later be found in Félix Gallardo's home, but it is

unlikely that he condoned Camarena's savage murder. Years later, Félix Gallardo would tell his DEA interrogators: "You said a madman would do it, and I am not mad. I am deeply sorry for the loss of your agent."]

Fatal Act and Consequences (February–November 1985)

Enrique Camarena was abducted off a street near Guadalajara's U.S. Consulate at noon on February 7, 1985, and taken to one of Caro Quintero's residences to be savagely tortured to death over the next two days. Caro Quintero thereupon fled into hiding, leaving an alarmed Félix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonseca, and other partners to devise an attempted diversion. Crushing pressure on the Mexican government from a furious American administration unleashed a flood of unfamiliar military and police units into Jalisco—unknown to cartel leaders and therefore unsusceptible to bribes or threats—who launched into a wholesale investigation by setting up dragnets and making mass-arrests.

Félix Gallardo's informal cartel collapsed under such relentless scrutiny, top members no longer being able to avoid arrests or convictions, while factions began breaking away and even former military and police collaborators turned against them. Caro Quintero was apprehended in Costa Rica on April 4, 1985, providing information that helped to locate and secure Ernesto Fonseca two days later in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. Many other traffickers would also be swept up during this massive manhunt, such as the Oaxaca Cartel leader Pedro Díaz Parada, detained while attempting to fly out of Mexico City toward Central America on April 24, 1985. Even the thoroughly discredited Federal Security Directorate (DFS) would be dissolved as well on November 29, 1985, while the hunt for Guadalajara Cartel fugitives would continue until their "godfather" Félix Gallardo was found.

Capture (April 1989)

Thanks to his immense personal fortune, this most-wanted drug lord was able to remain at large, although adopting a much lower public-profile than before. He eventually moved from Mazatlán with his family back to Guadalajara in March 1987, yet settled into two separate homes as a precautionary measure, only warily seeing his loved ones every other weekend. Tiring of this existence, Félix Gallardo considered surrendering to the Fourth District Court on his own terms, but his lawyer, Lic. Fernando Martínez Inclán, advised against such an act, instead suggesting that he wait another year in hopes of obtaining a better deal from a new incoming administration.

Then according to an account penned years later by Félix Gallardo himself, he arrived at his friend "Buddy" Ramos' home at 2718 Cosmos Street in Guadalajara's well-to-do Colonia Jardines del Bosque just a few minutes before noon on Saturday, April 8, 1989, to have lunch at the nearby Izao Restaurant with his longtime friend Guillermo "Memo" González Calderoni, *comandante* of the corrupt Policía Judicial Federal. At the appointed hour, five PJF agents entered Ramos' house and the unsuspecting cartel-leader—who had known these men "since 1971 from Culiacán"—went to greet them, only to be knocked down by a rifle butt. When González Calderoni appeared a few minutes later, a prostrate Félix Gallardo asked plaintively: "What's happening, Memo?"

Only a terse "I don't know you" was growled back. Within a couple of minutes, the captive 43-year-old drug lord was dragged outside and thrown into a Nissan "Ichi Van" or minibus to be transported to a

PJF safe house full of field-agents and monitoring equipment. There, the *comandante* hastily apologized and explained that Félix Gallardo's arrest had been ordered by the newly-installed President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and was part of a much larger operation—making it impossible to avoid or obstruct, although González Calderoni promised to help his captive friend and reassured him that he "would soon be released from jail."

However, upon phoning Mexico City for instructions, the hard-nosed *subprocurador* or "Deputy Attorney-General" Javier Coello Trejo—known in Mexico's underworld as the *Fiscal de Hierro* or "Iron Prosecutor" for his zeal and incorruptibility—ordered Félix Gallardo flown to the national capital. A white Learjet borrowed from the state-run Petróleos Mexicanos consortium (Pemex) arrived within the hour, so that by that same afternoon, the drug lord was sitting before Coello Trejo and his interrogators. After four days of harsh questioning, he was taken to Mexico City's Reclusorio Sur or "Southern Prison" and confined in its maximum-security wing. The Iron Prosecutor would later describe Félix Gallardo as a very intelligent man who was "a dry person, well-spoken and not coarse-tongued, who speaks directly and is a very strange individual, in that he is a devout Catholic and has even, through other people, donated money to the Church."

Although he did not realize it, Félix Gallardo's detention had been part of a much broader sweep. Simultaneous with his own arrest, Arturo Moreno—*comandante* of the 230 Policía Judicial del Estado de Sinaloa or "Sinaloa State Judicial Policemen" stationed in Culiacán—and Robespierre Lizárraga Coronel, director of that city's 300-man Policía Municipal force, arrived for a meeting at the headquarters of General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, commander of the Army's Ninth Military Zone. In one smooth action, these senior police commanders were taken into custody, while outside columns of military trucks began leaving to disarm and detain all of the men under their commands. In addition, Sinaloa's state public-security director was fired and his home seized, while the heads of the Federal Highway Police in Tamaulipas and Mexico City were also arrested over the next few hours. Most of Culiacán's low-ranking police officers and Sinaloa state policemen would be released next day, but some 80 were held over for more questioning—after which 90 municipal officers and 20 state policemen deserted.

Allotment of *Plazas* (Summer 1989)

Soon after his arrest, Félix Gallardo—through clandestine phone-calls made from prison—suggested that his disintegrated cartel's loose patchwork of regional bosses gather to peaceably work out and formalize their respective jurisdictions like a "family," mediated by Federal Judicial Police General González Calderoni. A summit meeting was duly held in Acapulco, at which *plazas* were allocated, some of the chosen titleholders eventually heading up their own cartels—a term that only gradually came into usage. It was said that Félix Gallardo still planned to oversee national operations, although he could no longer control every detail from prison. [For a more complete description of this distribution, see "Plaza."]

Félix Gallardo also suffered a personal blow when his godson, Rodolfo Sánchez Duarte, flew into Mexico City from Culiacán to visit with his incarcerated godfather on November 21, 1990, accompanied by his lawyer, Luis Manuel Pérez Fernández, and

businessman Jesús López. All three were abducted and their bodies found next morning in Colonia Renacimiento's garbage dump, in the suburban municipality of Ecatepec. They had been gagged, bound hand-and-foot, and shot with AK-47s, before receiving one final coup-de-grâce shot to the back of their heads from a 9mm.

Internment (November 1990)

Félix Gallardo was held in the *Reclusorio Sur* for three years, before receiving a 40-year sentence (the maximum allowable by law) and being transferred to the maximum-security Puente Grande penitentiary at Almoloya, Jalisco. Decades of appeals finally won him a retrial, but he was convicted again on August 23, 2017. His lawyers thereupon requested his transfer to a medium-security prison because of the 71-year-old's failing health, which was at first denied, then approved in December 2017.

See also: "Condor," Operation; Guadalajara Cartel; Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI): Policía Judicial Federal.

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Fox Quesada, Vicente (1942–Present).

Mexico's 55th president, whose 2000 electoral victory brought an end to decades of PRI misrule, yet whose police reforms and other anti-trafficking measures would fail to stem the rising tide of cartel power and violence.

Birth and Early Career (1942–1987)

Born in Mexico City on July 2, 1942, he was the second of nine children of José Luis Fox Pont and Mercedes Quesada Etxaide, a Basque emigrant from San Sebastián, Spain. His father's unusual surname was not of Irish origin, as some have speculated, but rather altered during the 1870s from its original German version "Fuchs" into the Anglicized version "Fox" by an ancestor who was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. Young Vicente spent his childhood and adolescence at the family ranch in San Francisco del Rincón, Guanajuato, then boarded for a year at Campion High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where he learned English. For college, he returned to Mexico City to attend the Universidad Iberoamericana, graduating by 1964 with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Upon leaving university, the 22-year-old Fox was hired by Coca-Cola México as a route supervisor, initially driving a delivery truck, before rising so rapidly through the ranks that within nine years, he was president and chief executive officer. After six years in that position, during which Coke supplanted Pepsi as Mexico's top-selling

soft drink and sales increased by almost 50 percent, the 37-year-old Fox was invited to head up all of Coca-Cola's Latin American operations, but declined and instead resigned from the company in 1979.

Political Rise (1988–1999)

Fox had decided to enter politics and so joined the conservative opposition Partido Acción Nacional or "National Action Party" (PAN) on March 1, 1988, winning election to the Federal Chamber of Deputies that same year as representative for the Third District of León, Guanajuato. After divorcing from his wife of 20 years in 1990, Fox ran for governor of Guanajuato that following year, suffering a controversial loss to its entrenched PRI interests, before rebounding four years later and winning that office by a 2-to-1 vote margin. His term in office would promote government efficiency and transparency, consolidation of small firms, overseas sales of goods manufactured in Guanajuato, and an extensive system of small loans intended to help the poor. By the time that his four-year administration ended, Guanajuato had become the fifth-ranked state in Mexico.

After opposition parties finally won a majority in the PRI-controlled national Chamber of Deputies on July 7, 1997, Fox decided to run for president. Despite facing several rivals, he represented the *Alianza por el Cambio* or "Alliance for Change"—a political coalition between his own National Action Party and the Green Ecological Party—and secured his candidacy by November 14, 1999. Strikingly tall at six feet four inches and with a deep voice, he won the presidential election on July 2, 2000 (his 58th birthday) with 43 percent of the popular vote, compared with 36 percent for Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Francisco Labastida and 17 percent for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Presidential Tenure (December 2000–December 2006)

Fox's victory marked an end to decades of entrenched PRI misrule, so that an assessment of all federal institutions was made during the five months before he was officially sworn into office on December 1, 2000, and a series of ambitious reforms implemented shortly thereafter. One entailed replacing the long-discredited Policía Judicial Federal (PJF) with a modern new force to be named the Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI), better prepared to combat the cartels' growing strength and pernicious influences. However, the AFI's activation was delayed for more than two years by congressional wrangling, so that it would not be until late January 2003 that Attorney-General Rafael Macedo de la Concha could announce that the PJF, as well as UEDO and FEADS, were to be dissolved and replaced. Such delays naturally handicapped the AFI's antidrug efforts, at a time when cartels were earning enormous profits and brazenly fighting battles for control of such strategic smuggling-hubs as Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, which even the Army could not constrain.

A more successful reform was the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública or "Public Safety Secretariat" (SSP), whose Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" force (PFP) listed 4,500 personnel by 2002, and was augmented next year to 5,326 with the addition of 900 troops from the Third Military Police Brigade, who had been detached to serve in the Fuerzas Federales de Apoyo or "Federal Support Forces" (FFA) and Fuerzas de Reacción y Alerta Inmediata or "Immediate

Alert-and-Response Forces" (FRAI). That same year of 2003, the Ministry of National Defense signed agreements with the SSP to make the Third Military Police Brigade its source for men, vehicles, weapons, and equipment, maintaining overall strength at 5,332 troops—including two generals, 398 officers, and 3,769 military policemen . The SSP would continue to draw from Army ranks, 862 more Third Brigade soldiers being reassigned from its ranks in 2004.

Although Fox personally gave approval for 100 GAFEs and 50 AFI agents to apprehend a major boss—Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén—on March 14, 2003, the drug wars still raged on. By the end of Fox's *sexenio* or "six-year term" in late November 2006, there were seven powerful cartels and 19 large autonomous cells operating in Mexico.

See also: Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI); FEADS; GAFE: Arresting Cartel Bosses; UEDO.

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Fuel Thefts—see "Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–Present): Fuel Thefts"

G

I am not afraid of Death,
I'm more afraid of living . . .

—from the *corrido* or "ballad" *La Muerte* by Tomás Méndez Sosa (ca. 1952)

GAFE (1986–Present). Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Airmobile Group," elite troops who carried out many of the earliest raids against drug lords, before being superseded by naval *marinos*.

Fuerza de Intervención Rápida (1986)
The Army's first special-forces unit was raised on a temporary basis in January 1986, as a *Fuerza de Intervención Rápida* or "Rapid Intervention Force" (FIR) intended to bolster security during the international World Cup soccer championship hosted by Mexico that same June. Concerned that such a high-profile event might be targeted by domestic or foreign agitators and terrorists, select troops were drawn from various regiments and assigned to this tactical-weapons unit, receiving advanced training in modern weaponry and counterterrorism tactics from France's *Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale* or "National Police Intervention-Group" (GIGN).

Grupo de Montañismo Anáhuac (1986–1989)
Upon this tournament's peaceful conclusion, the notion of retaining FIR on a permanent footing was taken up by certain military officers, who felt that having such a useful formation available warranted reconstituting it as of October 1986 as the recreational *Grupo de Montañismo Anáhuac* or "Anáhuac Mountaineering Group," which could fill in as a special-forces unit during an emergency. Some 64 men were chosen from among 156 volunteers, who—after completing basic-training in rappelling and other skills—were assigned to learn the complexities of descending from helicopters in live-action drills conducted with the Fuerza Aérea Mexicana or Mexican Air Force. By July 1987, this so-called "mountaineering group" was assigned its own base, where its five-dozen members continued their airborne and tactical training.

Peacetime "Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales" (1990–1994)
Eventually, the Estado Mayor de la Defensa Nacional or "National Defense High Command" (EMADEN, equivalent to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff), recognized the merits of maintaining this lone "mountaineering" company, so withdrew its temporary status as of June 1, 1990, to instead reconstitute it as the *Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales* or "Special-Forces Airmobile Group" (GAFE) on August 16, 1990. Its members were briefly assigned another base at La Paz, Baja California, before being relocated to Mexico City in November 1990. Three years later, this small GAFE unit still consisted of only a single under-strength company of some 50 commandos, who had received some weapons' and urban-assault training in the United States. They were

supposed to stand by as backups for major antidrug operations at their Santa Fe base in the national capital, but in fact remained unengaged under the direct supervision of the Secretaría de Defensa Nacional or "Secretariat of National Defense" (Sedena).

Wartime Expansion (1995–1997)

The Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas in January 1994 would dramatically transform the Army, as well as enhance GAFE status, being initially met with deployments of six conventional infantry battalions, two motorized-cavalry regiments, and three mortar companies into that troubled region—formations impervious to attack from their impoverished foes, yet too ponderous to pursue elusive guerrillas. The lone existing special-forces company was therefore reclassified as the *Fuerzas Especiales del I Cuerpo del Ejército* or "Army First Corps Special Forces," while the creation of numerous additional GAFE units was authorized as part of a broad modernization program. Most of the helicopters, light aircraft, modern weaponry, and equipment upgrades that would subsequently be purchased from abroad were destined for these new special-forces units.

The inauguration of President Ernesto Zedillo in December 1994, and his appointment of the more progressive General Enrique Cervantes Aguirre as his new secretary of defense, accelerated the development of specialized GAFE formations. Mexico's ten *regiones militares* would remain garrisoned as before, but it was intended to train and attach one special-forces company to each Estado Mayor or "High Command" in all ten jurisdictions. By early 1995, four separate training-facilities were also nearing completion, so as to provide basic training to GAFE volunteers in different environments:

- a desert setting at Laguna Salada, Baja California;
- high-altitude conditions at El Salto Nuevo Pueblo, Durango [later expanded to include advanced alpine-training atop the Nevado de Toluca, Iztaccíhuatl, and Pico de Orizaba Volcanoes];
- jungle and amphibious instruction at Xtomoc, 30 miles from Chetumal and six from Bacalar, Quintana Roo [this Subcentro de Adiestramiento de Operaciones Militares en Selva y Anfibias or "Amphibious and Jungle Military Operations' Training Sub-Center" (SUB/CAOSA) first opening in January 1999, and graduating more than 2,400 commandos over the next 12 years];
- plus urban exercises at Temamatla in the State of Mexico [with future facilities to be added at San Miguel de los Jagüeyes in the State of Mexico, and the Casa de la Muerte in the city of Puebla].

The color of camouflage uniforms issued to trainees varied according to each terrain: tan for desert settings, black for nocturnal urban exercises, etc. Airmobile tactics were taught separately at the Base Aérea Militar Número 1 or "Military Air Force Base Number One" at Santa Lucía in the State of Mexico.

A nationwide effort was also undertaken by the administration to tighten up external security, which because of years of PRI neglect had become ineffectual at guarding borders, gathering intelligence, preventing arms-imports, etc. Consequently, every major government department was to be discreetly overhauled and reinvigorated, so as to participate in a campaign codenamed Operación "Sellamiento" or "Seal"—its first priority being to reimpose border security, beginning in the south so as to impede money and weapons from reaching

the Zapatista rebels in their hidden jungle-camps.

The development of Army special-forces, meanwhile, continued and was legally confirmed as of June 1995, through congressional passage of Article 17 of the Organic Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force, plus Article 29 (1st and 14th Fractions) of the Organic Law for the Federal Public Administration. The first GAFE graduates would start reaching their frontline companies that same year, ten such units being activated in as many military regions. And in October 1995, U.S. Secretary of Defense William J. Perry visited Mexico, and his counterpart, General Cervantes, accepted his offer of providing advanced-training at American installations for this new generation of Mexican special-forces officers.

Within the next few months, young subalterns would begin arriving at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to receive instruction in antidrug operations from the U.S. Army's Seventh Special Forces Group, such trainees being mentioned in the January 1996 issue of that base's *Special Warfare* magazine as GAFEs, "an important component of the development of Mexican special-forces." Others apparently received "counterinsurgency" training at the controversial U.S. School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia [whose Spanish-language manuals would be made public under intense political pressure on September 20, 1996, revealing disturbing passages about tactical applications of torture, extortion, blackmail, and targeting of civilian noncombatants].

During a reciprocal visit to Washington by General Cervantes on April 22–26, 1996, a military-aid package was also signed by Secretary Perry that gave Mexico $50 million to acquire materiel for its new special-forces, such as 73 war-surplus Huey UH-1H helicopters from the Vietnam era [all of which would be returned as defective within a year, driving irritated Mexican officials to purchase Russian MI-8 and MI-17 helicopters], as well as four aged C-26 Fairchild airplanes; 500 outdated armored personnel-carriers; plus high-tech spy hardware, assault rifles, and grenades. The Mexican Supreme Court handed down a favorable ruling in May 1996, clarifying that the nation's armed forces could "intervene in public-security matters, as long as civilian authorities—even the government itself—request it." When Mexico's next Independence Day parade was held on September 16, 1996, some of these new special-forces units marched through the capital in green berets with their latest modern firearms.

This infusion of American funding allowed the Army to increase in overall size to 237,500 soldiers by late 1996 and expand its number of military regions to 12, all featuring at least one GAFE company by year's end. The May 1, 1997, issue of the presidential *Diario oficial* publicly affirmed the establishment of a "Special Forces Corps," as the Army restructured itself into:

- 12 *regiones militares*, each commanded by a major-general and comprising several subordinate *zonas militares*;
- 46 *zonas militares*, each commanded by a *general de brigada* or "brigadier general," garrisoned by a varying number of regiments and battalions, depending upon the extent of local threats;
- *cuarteles militares* or "military headquarters," one for each individual regiment under its respective colonel or lieutenant colonel;
- *guarniciones militares* or "military garrisons," usually comprising smaller detached companies under the command of a captain or first-lieutenant [every city

of 100,000 or more inhabitants being expected to house at least one such garrison]; and
- *partidas* or "detachments," smaller units under a sub-lieutenant or NCO that were temporarily acting as lookouts, guarding roadblocks and vital installations, etc.

A steady stream of junior officers continued receiving advanced-training at U.S. facilities, the American Embassy's electronic database in Mexico City recording that slightly more than 1,300 such visitors (including 420 GAFEs) were dispatched into the United States between November 1996 and September 1998, "after which unit-level training was discontinued." A September 1997 report to the U.S. Congress by the Executive Office of the President, noted that:

> *In* [fiscal year] *1996, approximately 300 Mexican military personnel completed counter-drug training provided by* [the Department of Defense]. *In* [fiscal year] *1997, more than 1,500 military personnel will be trained in an expanded counter-drug training program.*

The report went on to assert:

> *Central to the development of Mexico's counter-drug capability is the training of GAFE, elite Mexican Army units that have received special-forces and air-assault training for use in counter-drug interdiction operations. Training of GAFEs is scheduled to continue through* [the fiscal year of] *1999.*

The December 29, 1997, issue of the *New York Times* confirmed that "328 young [Mexican] officers will have completed special twelve- and thirteen-week programs" by year's end, to return home and impart their newfound knowledge among "air-mobile special-forces units" throughout Mexico. [Such instruction would be greatly facilitated once the Escuela Militar de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Military School" was opened on April 16, 1998, in the Iztaccíhuatl Volcano foothills outside Mexico City.] A Fuerza de Intervención Rápida or "Rapid Intervention Force" of select troops was also revived in 1997 and maintained as a standby unit, ready to be flown out at a moment's notice to reinforce troubled theaters. Even the Cuerpo de Policía Militar or "Military Police Corps" and Brigada de Fusileros Paracaidistas or "Fusilier-Parachutists Brigade" (BFP) would be authorized to raise their own GAFE companies in 1998—by which time almost full saturation had been achieved, more than 70 airmobile special-forces groups being operational.

For tactical strikes, GAFE aerial support would eventually include Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk; Russian medium MI-17/8; Israeli heavy CH-53 Yas'ur 2000; five-blade, five-passenger MD-530F; and Bell 212/412 helicopters. Weaponry would consist of FX-05 Xiuhcoatl and Heckler & Koch G3 assault rifles; M4 carbines; Heckler & Koch G3MP5 submachine guns; Barrett .50-caliber, Heckler & Koch G3PSG-1, Remington 700, and Fusil de Precisión Morelos sniper rifles; Remington M1100 and Mossberg 500 tactical shotguns; B-300, RL-83 Blindicide, and RPG-7 rocket launchers; Heckler & Koch P7M13, Beretta 92F & Colt .45 pistols; M249SAW light machineguns; as well as South African six-shot Milkor MGL Mk-1 and American single-shot M203 40mm grenade launchers.

Secondment as Federal Police Officers (1997–2000)

Ironically, the special forces' first active duty was an unorthodox assignment, 650 newly-minted GAFEs being temporarily

transferred from the Army to act as replacements in undermanned government agencies, many sent to the anti-narcotics prosecutorial branch of the Attorney-General's Office known as the Fiscalía Especializada para Atención a los Delitos contra la Salud or "Specialized Prosecutor's Office Regarding Crimes against Public Health" (FEADS). Deputized as federal *judiciales* or "judicial policemen," 350 of these soldiers were dispatched north to the Eighth Military Zone headquarters at Reynosa, to disperse as undercover field-agents and infiltrate drug-smuggling operations in the border-towns of Tamaulipas. Years later, one such military operative—Mateo Díaz López—would describe his FEADS service as follows [PGR/SIEDO/UIEDCS/122/2006]:

> *I was commissioned to carry out intelligence work related to the activities being conducted by said suspects, such as whether they were spending in American dollars, or driving stolen cars, or setting up* tiendas *or "stores"* [*i.e.*, street-level retail drug outlets]*, or if they had any ongoing* jales *or "jobs," with the aim of establishing whether they were mixed up in anything bad and reporting on it.*

In keeping with standard PGR field-practice, each of these covert agents was assigned a code number to maintain contact with their superiors, consisting of a double "ZZ" followed by successive numerals: ZZ-1, ZZ-2, etc. Field commanders were identified by "XX" and numerals—XX-1, XX-2, etc.—while the FEADS' state *sub-delegado* or "assistant deputy prosecutor" was distinguished by the letters "YY."

First Defections (1998–2000)

A small number of reassigned GAFEs would be seduced by the drug trade's generous pay and wealthy lifestyles, when compared with the paltry salaries and impossibility of social advancement within the class-conscious Mexican Army. One soldier who succumbed was Arturo Guzmán Decena, a 21-year-old GAFE corporal who was listed as having gone AWOL from his FEADS field-assignment on September 27, 1997, and months later would be spotted working as a personal bodyguard for Gilberto "El June" García Mena—longtime Gulf Cartel underboss for the border municipality of Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas [opposite Roma, Texas]. Guzmán would soon be joined by another fellow GAFE and FEADS field-operative: 23-year-old Corporal Heriberto Lazcano, who obtained his official discharge from military service in mid-April 1998, before also becoming part of "El June's" security detail.

The skills of these two highly-trained, tough young gunmen were so impressive that they soon came to the attention of Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, a claimant to the Gulf Cartel leadership at Matamoros. Legend has it that in February 1999, he instructed Guzmán to gather about 20 gunmen and murder one of his top rivals, and although this attack failed, Guzmán and Lazcano acquitted themselves so well that they were offered more contracts—which they performed with great alacrity. A few other GAFEs also learned about Guzmán's well-paid employment with a drug boss, so that a handful sought him out for similar positions. [For greater details, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003)."]

The tiny number of ex-GAFEs joining Guzmán's mercenary band was unwittingly augmented when the Army wound down its temporary loan-program of soldiers to FEADS in the first days of December 2000. The last 100 or so GAFEs returning to regular duties were paraded at their San Miguel de los Jagüeyes training-base (Campo

Militar 37-C) in the municipality of Huehuetoca near Mexico City, where a general officer told them that because of their detached service, those who wished to resign from the Army would be given an honorable discharge and severance pay with a bonus. More than half accepted and parted on good terms—but some months later, intelligence officers at the Eighth Military Zone headquarters in Reynosa would begin noticing several of their names reappearing as members of an emergent new criminal-gang along Tamaulipas's Frontera Chica between Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Miguel Alemán, calling themselves the "Zetas."

Coincidentally, Gulf Cartel boss Osiel Cárdenas had already instructed Guzmán to entice more GAFEs so as to create a criminal paramilitary force that same year of 2000. The charismatic ex-corporal had begun by discreetly contacting comrades still serving in his old units, and apparently persuaded at least seven members of the 15th Infantry Battalion's attached 308th GAFE Company to desert. More significantly, he also lured away six communication and intelligence specialists from the 104th GAFE Company, who had served in radio interception and counterintelligence capacities, and whose expertise—coupled with Cárdenas' willingness to buy the most expensive electronic equipment available—would provide the Zetas with technological superiority in intelligence gathering and secure communications over military, police, and rival gangs for years to come.

Congregation and Stabilization (2001–2004)

By January 1, 2002, the Army was constrained to eliminate a few extraneous units and gather its diverse GAFE groups into three Brigadas de Fuerzas Especiales, encompassing nine Batallones de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special Forces Battalions" and a single Fuerza de Intervención Rápida or "Rapid-Intervention Force," 5,500 troops in total—plus another 450 graduating every six months from various training-facilities. New installations were also being built, and the reorganized formations (together designated the I Cuerpo de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces First Corps") were to be distributed by September of that same year as follows:

Primera Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales headquartered at Puebla, Puebla, consisting of the:

- Primer Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales (1/BFE), based in the city of Puebla;
- Segundo y Tercer Batallones de Fuerzas Especiales or "Second and Third Special-Forces Battalions" (2/BFE and 3/BFE), stationed at San Miguel de los Jagüeyes in the State of Mexico; and the
- Décimo y Decimoprimer Batallones de Fuerzas Especiales or "10th and 11th Special-Forces Battalions" (10/BFE and 11/BFE), residing at Temamatla in the State of México.

Segunda Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales headquartered at Tijuana, Baja California, comprising the:

- Quinto Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales or "Fifth Special-Forces Battalion" (5/BFE), based in Tijuana;
- Sexto, Séptimo y Octavo Batallones de Fuerzas Especiales or "Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Special-Forces Battalions" (6/BFE, 7/BFE, and 8/BFE), stationed at Nogales, Sonora;
- Primer Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales or "First Amphibious Special-Forces Group" (1/GANFE) residing in San Felipe, Baja California;

- Segundo Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales or "Second Amphibious Special-Forces Group" (2/GANFE), based at Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur; and the
- Tercer Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales or "Third Amphibious Special-Forces Group" (3/GANFE), stationed at Esperanza, Sonora.

Tercera Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales headquartered at Ciudad Ixtepec, Oaxaca, and made up of the:

- Cuarto Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales or "Fourth Special-Forces Battalion" (4/BFE) located at Ciudad Ixtepec, Oaxaca
- Noveno Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales or "Ninth Special-Forces Battalion" (9/BFE) and Fuerza de Intervención Rápida or "Rapid-Intervention Force" (FIR), both based at San Juan Copular, Chiapas
- Cuarto Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales or "Fourth Amphibious Special-Forces Group" (4/GANFE) residing at Cancún, Quintana Roo
- Quinto Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales or "Fifth Amphibious Special-Forces Group" (5/GANFE) stationed at Dzilam de Bravo, Yucatán

Although the GAFEs had technically ceased to exist under this old acronym, it would nevertheless remain customary to refer to them as such throughout Mexico.

The Special Forces Military School in the Iztaccíhuatl Volcano foothills was officially renamed the Centro de Adiestramiento de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special Forces Training Center" as of May 1, 2002, its instructors being veteran captains and lieutenants who had graduated from its Curso de Oficiales Instructores de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special Forces Officer Instructors' Course," and so were known as COIFEs. The curriculum consisted of a:

- Curso Básico de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Basic Course"
- Curso de Operaciones de Intervención or "Operational Interventions Course" (COI)
- Curso Básico de Contraterrorismo or "Basic Counterterrorism Course" (CBCT)
- Francotirador or "Sniper" Training
- Curso de Operaciones Urbanas or "Urban Operations Course" (COU)
- Protección a Funcionarios or "Security Details"
- Seguridad Integral or "Integrated Security"
- Brechadores y Explosivistas or "Sappers and Explosive Experts Course"
- Curso de Sargentos de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Sergeants' Course" (CSFE)
- Curso Avanzado de Instructores de Fuerzas Especiales or "Advanced Special-Forces Instructors' Course" (CAIFE)
- Curso de Oficiales Instructores de las Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Officer Instructors' Course" (COIFE)

It was estimated that because of these various disruptive relocations, the number of GAFEs available for front-line duty temporarily declined to roughly 1,500 troops by 2003, before slowly rebounding. And a new headquarters for the entire Special Forces Corps was also completed at the prestigious Campo Militar 1-A in Mexico City by 2004.

Arresting Cartel Bosses (2002–2005)

Because of their mobility, superior firepower, body armor, unit cohesion, stealth, and intelligence resources, GAFE strike teams would successfully supplant federal, state, and municipal police agencies in

carrying out many of the earliest apprehensions of cartel bosses, such as:

- Tijuana Cartel leader Benjamín Arellano Félix, taken in the city of Puebla without a shot being fired on March 9, 2002;
- Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, subdued in Matamoros despite vigorous resistance from his Zeta bodyguards on March 14, 2003;
- Milenio Cartel leader Armando Valencia Cordero, arrested peacefully in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga southeast of Guadalajara by members of the Eighth GAFE Battalion on August 15, 2003;
- Javier "El J. T." Torres Félix, a top lieutenant for Sinaloa Cartel boss Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, targeted in Culiacán on January 27, 2004;
- founder of La Familia Michoacana, Carlos Alberto "El Tísico" Rosales Mendoza, scooped up in a Morelia suburb on October 24, 2004; etc.

GAFEs could also be quickly deployed in numbers as reinforcements for troubled areas, such as when Nuevo Laredo's new police chief was brazenly murdered within six hours of assuming office on June 8, 2005, prompting fearful inquiries into public safety from the U.S. ambassador. Three days later, President Vicente Fox sent in 250 GAFEs aboard military transports from Matamoros, to be driven into Nuevo Laredo in a convoy of 32 Army vehicles and dispersed at various points around that city (including both international bridges), while another 600 were simultaneously deposited in Reynosa.

Sagging Morale and Contraction (2006–2007)

But although scarcely a dozen GAFEs had lost their lives in the line of duty since first being deployed in 1997, morale throughout the Army as a whole was eroding because of the futile, unending struggle against drug traffickers—rewarded only with public opprobrium, pitiable pay, and inadequate support-services. Between 1995 and 2004, 1,560 GAFEs deserted, a loss-rate of almost 25 percent—1,383 of these "unauthorized absences" being recorded during 2000–2005 alone. The desertion rate for the entire Army was even worse: 99,767 soldiers abandoning their posts between 2001 and November 2006, an average of 46 men a day. [In a newspaper interview granted by retired Major-General Luis Garfias on January 29, 2006, he would recollect that "there was a time when the Army had to be entirely replenished three times over with troops, because all of its people were leaving."]

When President-elect Felipe Calderón was inaugurated and almost immediately promulgated an all-out, aggressive "war against drug traffickers" early in December 2006, GAFE manpower had declined from its nominal strength of 5,500 to 5,106 soldiers, a figure that would continue to dwindle to 5,046 in 2007, 4,928 by 2008, 4,916 in 2009, and just 4,746 by 2010. What was by then officially known as the Cuerpo de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special Forces Corps" (CFE) had been further reduced in size when the special-forces companies of the Brigada de Fusileros Paracaidistas and Policía Militar were both returned to their respective branches as of April 16, 2007, while the Army's Grupos Anfibios de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Amphibious Groups" (GANFEs) were halved in number as of July 16, 2007.

A Notorious GAFE Deserter (2004–2014)

Lieutenant Manuel Alejandro Aponte Gómez, originally born in Chilpancingo,

Guerrero, had been enrolled into Mexico's Colegio Militar in 1993, and graduated three years later. After his initial Army posting as a *subteniente* or "junior lieutenant," he had apparently undergone four months' basic GAFE training from December 2000 until the end of March 2001, specializing in the use of grenade launchers and bazookas, after which he served from April 2001 until April 2003 with the 200-man Seventh Infantry Company in the town of Badiraguato (probably coming into contact with representatives from Sinaloa Cartel leaders Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, who both maintained large estates in its rugged, mountainous interior). When his unit was rotated south to garrison San Ignacio, Aponte was brought up on minor charges in Mexico City—and despite being cleared by August 2003, was not allowed to rejoin his old company, instead being sent to languish as a *suelto* or "unattached" officer at the Infantry Directorate's *banca* or "bench," hoping to find a new posting.

After eight months of idleness, the disillusioned Aponte deserted the Army as of May 8, 2004, and reappeared a few months later as an important member of Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal's newly-raised "Los Negros" paramilitary unit, financed by the Sinaloa Cartel. Aponte was identified as the organizer of a hit squad that murdered Rodolfo "El Niño de Oro" Carrillo Fuentes (younger brother of Juárez Cartel boss Vicente Carrillo Fuentes), along with his wife, Gioavana, and six other people in the Cinépolis movie-complex's parking lot at 450 Culiacán Boulevard West in Culiacán's Colonia Recursos Hidráulicos on Sunday, September 11, 2004—despite the fact that these victims were under the personal protection of *comandante* Pedro Pérez of the Policía Ministerial del Estado or "State Ministerial Police" (PME), who was also wounded during this attack. The assassins were so well armed and positioned that their eight victims were cut down by AK-47 rounds flying in from every direction, before their security detail could react. [It was not until after these hit men had fled the scene in two armored SUVs that one vehicle crashed into a police roadblock outside the city, and its five *sicarios* were killed in two separate shootouts.]

Aponte reemerged six months afterward, in a photograph posted online in early March 2005, posing amid a group portrait of "El Chapo" Guzmán's 35 personal bodyguards. The GAFE deserter proved a valued instructor in modern weaponry as well, but his greatest contribution for the Sinaloans came in reorganizing Guzmán's escort along proper military lines, ensuring that every member carried the same interchangeable assault rifle, pistol, munitions, and radio so as to function interactively during action, as well as highlighting the value of gathering and analyzing intelligence before any encounter, so as to gain a tactical advantage.

The ex-GAFE lieutenant's input paid dividends when El Chapo's three-dozen escorts bumped into a patrol of about 30 GAFEs during the summer of 2006 near Moinora Hill, high up in the Triángulo Dorado mountains, and a protracted firefight ensued. When this Army patrol was reinforced by a 42nd Infantry Battalion company hastily flown out of Badiraguato, the gun battle quickly turned in the soldiers' favor. Guzmán was saved thanks only to the effective resistance put up by Aponte's well-trained men, plus the fact that the deserter himself carried El Chapo on his back down a steep incline to safety.

Naturally, such a harrowing escape won Aponte El Chapo's gratitude, who appointed

him chief of all his security details, and furthermore gained the ex-GAFE officer the nickname *El Bravo* or "the Fierce One." Isaías "El Memín" Valdez Ríos, another GAFE deserter, would later testify how a few months later, Aponte helped Guzmán club two captive Zetas to death outside Coluta, Durango, burning their bodies in a pit. The ex-lieutenant moved up in the cartel hierarchy, it being reported by January 2008 that El Bravo was engaged in recruiting new *sicarios* as far afield as Guatemala and San Diego, California, to be trained at various camps around Culiacán, Durango, and Chihuahua. And in August 2009, it was noted that when the 500-acre Rancho Las Trancas grow-operation—complete with its own power generators, worker dormitories, satellite dishes, landing strip, etc.—was raided high up in the mountains of the municipality of Tamazula, Durango, Aponte was named as its absentee owner. Eventually, his good fortune faded until Aponte's body was found near the town of Tanques de Elota, shot six times in the head and neck by unknown attackers on the evening of Tuesday, April 8, 2014.

[Another even more ill-starred GAFE deserter was revealed during the vicious Zeta offensive against the Sinaloan stronghold of Acapulco, when a human head was found on the staircase of that city's Palacio Municipal on June 29, 2006, along with a note from the defenders addressed to Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano: "So that you will keep sending me more of your GAFE a**holes." The head belonged to Hugo Carpio Herrera, who had resigned from the Army special-forces only that previous year, to join the Zetas.]

Assorted Operations (2006–2009)

Notwithstanding their morale problems and dwindling numbers, GAFEs were still present in numerous frontline confrontations:

- At midnight on January 23–24, 2006, in the wake of an unexpected street-clash between GAFEs in a military vehicle and armed gunmen in a Toyota pickup that had left two soldiers dead and three badly wounded, two-dozen GAFEs spearheaded an assault by federal agents against the suspects' safe-house on Paseo de Laureles Street in the wealthy Bosque de las Lomas district of Mexico City, disgorging from their armored four-door Dodge Ram pickups to subdue and secure this dwelling.
- In February 2006, 120 GAFEs supported federal agents in searching for four suspected Sinaloa Cartel *sicarios* in Monterrey, Nuevo León.
- In July 2007, following bomb attacks against gas pipelines in Guanajuato and Queretaro—apparently by members of the Ejército Popular Revolucionario or "People's Revolutionary Army" (EPR)—more than 1,000 GAFEs were dispatched to temporarily augment surveillance around oil and thermoelectric facilities.
- In early August 2007, over 150 GAFEs conducted a sweep through the rough suburb of Nezahualcóyotl in the State of Mexico, apparently searching for suspected EPR members [witnesses reported that these soldiers even pointed their assault rifles at municipal police patrols, ordering them to leave the area].
- On January 21, 2008, a GAFE strike team from the Ninth Military Zone—complete with armored Hummers—halted a BMW SUV as it exited from a fortified residence in Culiacán's Colonia Burócratas, and without firing a shot arrested the youngest Beltrán Leyva brother, Alfredo "El Mochomo."
- When almost 500 troops were flown as reinforcements aboard three Hercules and a Boeing 727/100 into Ciudad Juárez

on March 28, 2008, followed next day by 1,100 more, to be dispersed throughout that troubled city and eight adjacent municipalities in an effort to stem the violence that had claimed more than 200 lives over the preceding few months, GAFEs would be detailed to man an "aeromobile reserve" complete with helicopter gunships, command center, and ten *Bases de Operaciones Mixtas* or "Mixed-Operations Bases" (BOMs).

- Eduardo "El Doctor" Arellano Félix—last of the seven founding brothers of the Arellano-Félix Organization, accompanied by a lone *sicario* and his 11-year-old daughter, Alicia—was arrested by GAFEs from the 5o. Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales while supporting a Policía Federal raid on a residence in Tijuana's middle-class Fraccionamiento Lomas del Pedregal around 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 25, 2008.
- On December 28, 2009, 350 GAFE reinforcements were flown into Juárez aboard a Hercules transport, to replace outgunned Policía Militar contingents as part of the ongoing 8,000-man Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua or "Joint Operation Chihuahua"—although like other units before them, the GAFEs would find their operations limited to holding a few key fortified strong-points and making lonely night patrols through dark city streets, mostly avoided by civilians and criminals.

Supplanted by Naval Special-Forces (Christmas 2009)

Among other complications, GAFE companies had also begun experiencing problems in their frontline role of raiding cartel strongholds, their "surprise" descents being frequently preempted by security breaches, allowing intended targets to disappear. (The young subalterns and soldiers themselves were usually not suspected, but rather it was collaborators within the senior military staff who anonymously phoned such warnings.) For this reason, when the Army refused to act on a U.S. intelligence report that the most-wanted cartel boss Arturo Beltrán Leyva was hosting a Christmas party at a luxurious house in Ahuatepec outside Cuernavaca, Morelos, on December 11, 2009, a Navy special-forces unit was substituted—narrowly missing him. But a follow-up naval assault five days later trapped this drug baron in an apartment complex in Cuernavaca's Lomas de la Selva district, killing Beltrán and four of his companions in a 90-minute shootout.

One of many Mexican newspaper columnists commenting approvingly about the naval special-forces' involvement, pointed out that the dead drug-lord's:

> *. . . capacity for corrupting institutions was such, that the detention of this "boss of bosses" this past December had to be entrusted to the Navy, and not to the Army as is customary, for fear that he might receive a* chivatazo [warning] *emerging from some military headquarters.*

And a "top secret" U.S. Embassy cable dated January 29, 2010, described the mounting disappointment with the Army's performances, such as in battleground border-cities:

> *Only two percent of those arrested in Ciudad Juárez have even been charged with a crime. The failure to reduce violence has focused attention on the military's perceived failures, and led to a major course-change in January* [2010] *to switch the overall command in Ciudad Juárez from the military to the Federal Police. The military was not trained to patrol the streets or carry out law enforcement*

operations. It does not have the authority to collect and introduce evidence into the judicial system. The result: arrests skyrocketed, prosecutions remained flat, and both the military and public have become increasingly frustrated. The command change in Juárez has been seen by political classes and the public, as a Presidential repudiation of SEDENA . . . an agency smarting from the very public statement of a lack of confidence in its performance. We are having some success in influencing the GOM [Government of Mexico] *to transition the military to secondary support-functions in Juárez.*

As a result of their diminished reputation and *marino* successes, GAFEs would find themselves relegated to a secondary role, such as reinforcing beleaguered outposts beset by gang-violence; another 548 of their Cuerpo de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special Forces Corps" (CFE) would also desert in 2014–2015, although rank-and-file members still continued to perform bravely. On November 30, 2016, General Salvador Cienfuegos—the Army's commander-in-chief—reported that 246 soldiers had been killed and another 1,403 wounded during ten years of warfare against the cartels.

See also: FEADS; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto.

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GANFE (1998–2007). *Grupo Anfibio de Fuerzas Especiales del Ejército* or "Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group," a stillborn branch which vainly tried to train soldiers for service on rivers, lakes, and coastal waterways—not to be confused with the Navy's Infantería de Marina.

Historical Backdrop (1994–1998)

The eruption of the Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas in January 1994 would see the Army dramatically transformed, its outdated formations being replaced with smaller, more agile formations like the Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Airmobile Groups" (GAFEs). It also increased in overall strength to 237,500 soldiers by late 1996, and its first fully-functional GAFE units were operational by 1998.

However, not wishing to forgo any of the extra funding that was still available, the Army High Command decided to further raise an additional 36 "Amphibious Special-Forces Groups" (GANFEs), so as

to train soldiers to conduct waterborne patrols against seaborne smugglers such as the unmarked ships and seaplanes dropping bundles of Colombian cocaine at night off Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, or the fast-boats running drug cargoes from northern Mexico into California, Texas, and Louisiana. Yet the creation of such a skillful force would prove much more difficult and time-consuming than the generals realized, and be resented as a jurisdictional encroachment by the Navy.

Foundation and Complications (1999–2006)

The Army High Command nevertheless announced its intended creation of these three-dozen Grupos Anfibios during the late summer of 1999, proceeding quickly after $13 million was allocated by the American government toward the purchase of 140 light boats and other specialized equipment to outfit soldiers volunteering for such duty, who would become known as *anfibios* or "amphibians." But it soon became apparent that a six-week instructional course could never hope to prepare inexperienced soldiers for handling small boats under shifting weather and current conditions out on the open sea, or for the difficulties of navigating after nightfall or beyond sight of land. Months of intensive teaching would be required to transform unschooled landsmen into competent mariners, at a time when enlistments were shrinking and desertions multiplying, making it impossible to prepare and retain the 15,000 trained men needed to sustain 36 amphibious groups.

The Navy simultaneously launched a bureaucratic protest to wrest these marine resources away from the military and over to its own control. For the next seven years, the Army High Command would stubbornly refuse, pointing out a few successful riverbank operations as proof that their waterborne troops were becoming more adept, despite ample evidence to the contrary. Worse still, the GANFE's manpower had only slowly risen to 3,500 men, stalling the number of operational groups at nine under-strength formations, well short of the projected three-dozen. And the Army's GAFE companies also experienced problems in their frontline role against the cartels, raids being frequently revealed by security breaches, allowing targeted dealers to remove large quantities of narcotics and disappear. Army morale sagged and desertions rose, 99,767 soldiers abandoning their posts between 2001 and November 2006—an average of 46 a day.

Meanwhile, the Navy's Infantería de Marina established its own special forces as of 2001, comprising 460 select volunteers who received 53 weeks' in-depth instruction, while the Army was obliged to initiate a drawdown late that same year, eliminating a few extraneous units and re-concentrating its disperse GAFE and GANFE groups into three Brigadas de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Brigades" and a single Fuerza de Intervención Rápida or "Rapid-Intervention Force" as of January 1, 2002. By September of that same year, only five GANFE groups remained on the Army's organizational tables:

- 1/GANFE or "First Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group" based at San Felipe, Baja California
- 2/GANFE or "Second Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group" at Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur
- 3/GANFE or "Third Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group" at Esperanza, Sonora

- 4/GANFE or "Fourth Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group" at Cancún, Quintana Roo
- 5/GANFE or "Fifth Army Amphibious Special-Forces Group" at Dzilam de Bravo, Yucatán.

It was furthermore estimated that by 2003, the actual number of *anfibio* troops stood at only 620, the other 2,900 personnel being mostly support-staff such as instructors, boatmen, carpenters, mechanics, quartermaster personnel, warehousemen, administrators, etc.

Transfer from Army to Navy Control (2007–Present)

Eventually, the inauguration of President Felipe Calderón and his promulgation of an all-out "war against drugs" in early December 2006 would lead to the virtual elimination of the Army's amphibious experiment. In a gesture intended to improve intra-service cooperation, Army General Guillermo Galván Galván—Secretary of National Defense—and Admiral Mariano Francisco Saynez Mendoza—Secretary of the Navy—presided over a joint meeting at headquarters in Mexico City on February 14, 2007, which included the chairmen of the Chamber of Deputies' Defense and Navy Committees to prepare a study on the best way of transferring GANFE resources to the Navy. No consensus could be reached, leaving the Army to counter-propose in May of that same year that its 3,500 GANFE personnel be redeployed to help form a new joint-services task force to be called the *Cuerpo Especial de Fuerzas de Apoyo Federal* or "Federal Support-Forces Special Corps" (CEFAF), thereby merging GANFE operations with the Navy's—"not with the intent of directly interfering in its functions, but rather to cover rivers, lakes and coastal waters within [the Army's] jurisdiction by means of coastal patrols, aerial reconnaissance, and interceptions."

This proposal was rejected by both the Navy and Calderón administration, and Mexico's Congress further enacted a special legislative bill entitled "Maritime Secretariat Agreement 88" on July 8, 2007—in response to urgent appeals from the state governors of Aguascalientes and Zacatecas, requesting the presence of reliable *marino* detachments in times of crisis—which granted the Navy wide-ranging police powers "to operate throughout the country, even in landlocked areas." After reviewing the results of an inquiry conducted by the Chamber of Deputies' Comisión de Marina or "Navy Commission," which again affirmed the GANFE's unresolved shortcomings (such as the "limited operational capacity of its boats, plus the scant preparation of the personnel who man them"), Congress passed another bill in August 2007 which directed that all GANFE personnel, installations, and equipment—including 143 large boats, 110 smaller launches, six inflatable Zodiac speedboats, and eight military-grade jet skis—be transferred to the Navy's inventories. The Army had no choice but to comply, although it still did not disband its GANFE units altogether, retaining their numerals on its tables-of-strength as late as 2012, and next year mentioning that a very restricted training-regimen was still being maintained. As recently as February 2017, Sergeant Fortino Aguilera Aguilera—an *anfibio* instructor at the Dive School on Cozumel, Quintana Roo—died during a training exercise.

Rare GANFE Turncoat (2001–2014)

Since no *anfibios* ever saw frontline duty against the cartels, few deserted to take up better-paying jobs with these criminal

syndicates. One exception would be Carlos Manuel "El Cóndor" Hoo Ramírez, born on October 15, 1978, in Los Mochis, Sinaloa. After completing his *secundaria* or "junior high school" education, he had joined the Army's 89th Infantry Battalion on June 1, 1997; was reassigned three times—on November 1, 1998, December 16, 1998, and March 16, 1999—suggesting that he might have been detached to serve as an undercover FEADS field-agent; was promoted to corporal as of June 16, 1999; and after receiving amphibious training, was transferred into the 209th GANFE group at Culiacán, Sinaloa. He then resigned from military service on September 1, 2000, using the standard bureaucratic excuse of having to deal with "family problems."

But Hoo was evidently recruited by Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, shortly after the latter's prison-escape on January 19, 2001, rising through the ranks until he had become El Chapo's trusted communications chief and personal bodyguard by 2010–2011. In the final pursuit by naval special-forces that chased Guzmán from several safe houses in February 2014, the drug lord finally went to ground inside the beachfront Suites Miramar condominiums in Mazatlán. Guided by intelligence provided by the DEA and U.S. Marshals Service, ten pickups bearing 65 tough *marinos* came gliding out of the predawn darkness and silently approached this 13-story building at 3:45 a.m. on Saturday, February 22, 2014, subduing the lone bodyguard found on watch inside its lobby: Carlos "El Cóndor" Hoo, armed with an AK-47 and grenade launcher. Powerless to intervene, the ex-GANFE could only watch as some 30 *marinos* stole past and made their way up to the fourth floor by both elevators and stairs, storming and securing his boss without a shot being fired.

See also: Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Infantería de Marina.

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García Ábrego, Juan (1944–Present).

Crime boss who inherited an inconsequential gang of petty smugglers, car thieves, and red-light operators in the border city of Matamoros, transforming it into the Gulf Cartel.

Birth and Early Criminal Life (1944–1970s)

Born on September 13, 1944, on a poor ranch named La Puerta 13 miles outside Matamoros, Tamaulipas, he would file papers two decades later claiming to have been born and baptized as a U.S. citizen. The first of three boys and five girls sired by tenant farmer Albino "Chacho" García and Estela "Chacha" Ábrego, young Juan only ever received a primary-school education at the "Franklin D. Roosevelt" school while living for a few years at 130 Calle Doce, between Bravo and Bustamante streets in Matamoros, before having to join his father and younger brother Humberto "Chichí" García Ábrego in working the hardscrabble family ranch.

But by the age of 15, Juan was consorting with his delinquent cousins, sons of Juan Nepomuceno Guerra Cárdenas—the local crime-boss who controlled most

cross-border traffic in stolen cars, contraband cigarettes, gambling, prostitution, etc.—and who would mentor his teenage nephew as a car thief. In order to enhance his usefulness, the 20-year-old García Ábrego—despite his birth having long ago been recorded in Matamoros' *Registro Civil* or "Civil Registry" [*Libro 6 de 1945, acta 136*]—nonetheless appeared before a Brownsville notary and offered "proof" of having actually been born in Cameron County's tiny town of La Paloma [population: 1,000] in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, and for a $35 fee received an American birth-certificate as of May 18, 1965 [number 100741, folio 59895].

Combative Entry into Trafficking (Mid-1970s–1986)

As his uncle's favorite, García Ábrego was well positioned to assume a more active role once the aging Guerra approved expanding local operations to include shipments of Mexican marijuana and heroin into Texas, Louisiana, and Florida during the mid-1970s. As profits rose, his nephew would become one of the most prosperous landholders in northern Tamaulipas, owner of the best lands and agricultural equipment—as well as a vicious threat to rival dealers in the unseen smuggling underworld. Although now infirm and wheelchair-bound, his uncle could still be found most days in his "Piedras Negras" Restaurant in Matamoros, remaining in overall command while leaving field management to his chosen successor, García Ábrego.

His 40-year-old nephew—with Guerra's consent—dispatched a hit squad under his lieutenant Óscar "El Profe" López Olivares on May 15, 1984 to ambush Casimiro "El Cacho" Espinoza Campos, another trafficker vying for preeminence along the border, sending him badly wounded to the private Clínica Raya medical center on Matamoros' south side. Two mornings later, eight gunmen in camouflage uniforms with high-powered weapons charged from a van and black Ford Grand Marquis to burst into that hospital at dawn, firing off more than 300 rounds during their ten-minute attack that killed a guard, a husband and son visiting an ailing woman, a bedridden 35-year-old woman, Espinoza's sister, plus two other people, without finding the wounded Cacho himself. He was rescued shortly thereafter by 30 of his gunmen in a half-dozen cars, who escorted their convalescent boss to the Hospital Universitario in distant Monterrey, where died of his original wounds a few days later.

Rise to Power (1987–1990)

Although still only a medium-sized border operation, Guerra's so-called *Grupo de Matamoros* had nonetheless become sufficiently wealthy by the mid-1980s, to consider trans-shipping consignments of much more expensive Colombian cocaine. Rumor has it that the first such loads which García Ábrego handled, came from cargoes that had been intercepted by the authorities in Oaxaca under a venal Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" (DFS) *comandante* named Tomás Morlette Bórquez. His short-lived partnership with García Ábrego would quickly reveal just how profitable such business could become, but the two had a falling-out and exchanged harsh words on January 27, 1987—after which Morlette was found dead, shot twice in the back in the doorway of Guerra's restaurant.

It is believed that García Ábrego began to first exert real influence as leader over his Matamoros associates dating from that murder, and his subsequent attraction of a cocaine source in Medellín interested in his

network of experienced smugglers in Tamaulipas—a sparsely populated border-state with a lengthy, unpatrolled coastline and multiple access-points into the United States. By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, it was estimated García Ábrego was already smuggling over 300 metric tons of cocaine across the U.S. border every year, the interception of one such nine-ton load leading to his indictment for "cocaine distribution" and a dozen related charges by a federal court in Dallas on November 19, 1990. His expanding Matamoros Group now began to be referred to as the Tamaulipas Cartel, and he signaled his leadership claim by arranging the gentle arrest of his elderly and infirm uncle Guerra on a tax-evasion charge early next year by the corrupt and compliant DFS commander Guillermo González Calderoni (soon securing the old man's release).

Cali Cocaine-Contact (1991–1993)

But García Ábrego attained his greatest success as the Medellín Cartel gave way to a rival syndicate out of Cali under the brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela, who in March 1991 sent George López as their representative to Matamoros to meet with Óscar Malherbe de León, Garcia Ábrego's trusted lieutenant. Two more secret meetings were held with this new Cali Cartel, one in January 1992 in Central America (most likely Guatemala) and the last five months afterward in Matamoros again, during which García Ábrego negotiated a much better deal: 50 percent of every consignment delivered, instead of the $1,500 per kilo that his Matamoros Group had been receiving from the Medellín Cartel. This renegotiation nonetheless meant that García Ábrego had to guarantee these shipments from Cali would reach their destinations in the United States.

He consequently bought a half-dozen large cattle-ranches around Soto la Marina, a town 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and 125 miles south of Matamoros, where Turbo Commander airplanes soon began descending out of the night to land on improvised dirt runways and deliver bulging green duffel bags. Hundreds of tons of cocaine were warehoused along Mexico's northern border, waiting to be smuggled across to his new distribution network on the American side. Some measure of García Ábrego's success was uncovered in February 1993, when officials of the Beverly Hills (California) branch of American Express Bank International were indicted for laundering over $100 million of his profits. The federal government tried to recoup some $60 million but could seize only $30 million that had moved through banks in McAllen, Texas, and New York City. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve fined the bank $950,000 for its misconduct, while a 50-man task force under Eduardo Valle Espinosa was detailed by Mexico's Attorney-General Jorge Carpizo specifically to hunt down this latest drug kingpin—to no avail, thanks to García Ábrego's far-reaching bribery into political, military, and police organizations. And by now, his Tamaulipas Cartel was being openly referred to as the Gulf Cartel.

Seizure of Power (1994–1995)

García Ábrego's mother died of cancer in the Brownsville Regional Hospital on November 11, 1993, and he took her loss hard. Nevertheless, having already broken the power of his only serious rival for cartel leadership—the incarcerated Oliverio Chávez Araujo, self-styled *Zar de la Cocaína* or "Tsar of Cocaine," a former Army second-sergeant who had learned the drug trade from his uncle Hilario Guillén

Araujo—by orchestrating a bloody riot in Matamoros' prison that left 18 of Chávez's followers dead and many others wounded on May 17, 1991. García Ábrego next proceeded to have Even Rubalcaba murdered in 1994, and openly assumed the title of Gulf Cartel leader.

Given his long tenure as Juan Guerra's chosen successor, plus the enormous profits being generated by his arrangement with the Cali suppliers, his powerful influence at every level of official circles, and his immense personal wealth, García Ábrego's claim went uncontested. It was said that by now he owned dozens of airplanes, 24,000 hectares of land, and at least ten ranches, home to large cattle-herds and many fine racehorses, plus his own racetrack at Pesquería, Nuevo León. His sudden apprehension would therefore come as a complete surprise.

Abrupt Arrest and Deportation (1996)

On the Sunday evening of January 14, 1996, García Ábrego was unexpectedly captured by Horacio Brunt Acosta, director of intelligence for the Instituto Nacional para el Combate de las Drogas or "National Institute for Combating Drugs" (INCD) and 14 of his federal agents, in an operation codenamed *Leyenda* or "Legend." The immensely wealthy and powerful drug-lord simply drove up alone in a Chevrolet pickup to spend the night on a small ranch that he owned in the rural municipality of Villa Juárez, Nuevo León. Because he had claimed years earlier to have not been born in Mexico, but rather in La Paloma, Texas, the Mexican government transferred their "American" prisoner that same Sunday night into Monterrey, and extradited him two days later aboard a Mexican Air Force Grumman jet to Houston to stand trial on multiple charges.

This removal of the Gulf Cartel leader, still only 51 years of age, was so abrupt that no succession struggle immediately ensued. Instead, his longtime lieutenant Óscar Malherbe de León temporarily succeeded him in command, before himself being seized in a shopping center in the Mixcoac district of Mexico City on February 26, 1997 (despite allegedly offering his captors a $2 million bribe to be let go) and sentenced to a lengthy prison-term in Almoloya de Juárez. Only then did ambitious associates begin seriously challenging for the leadership, eventually won by Osiel Cárdenas Guillén.

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel; Cocaine; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Gulf Cartel.

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Gasoline Thefts—see "Zetas (2014–Present) Vieja Escuela: Fuel Thefts"

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Goma* or *gomero—see "Heroin"

Guadalajara Cartel (1978–1985). Mexico's original drug-conglomerate, whose members worked together most profitably, before being shattered by the angry reaction to their senselessly cruel murder of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena.

Background (1977–1982)

After two years' preparation, a joint U.S.-Mexican campaign codenamed Operation "Condor" was launched in mid-January 1977 to eradicate clandestine narcotics-fields dotting northwestern Mexico, through aerial spraying and overland Army sweeps. Initial results proved promising, many minor arrests being made and illegal plots destroyed over the next few months, greatly reducing output. Feuds erupted among surviving traffickers, fighting over the dwindling supply of narcotics; but top *narco* bosses were left relatively unscathed because of regularly bribing police, military, DFS, and PRI officials, so that they were better able to weather this storm—while many of their smaller and less well-connected competitors went under. [For greater details on this eradication effort, see "'Condor,' Operation."]

Given the uncertainties of this period, many drug lords started to acquire mansions as retreats for their families in Mexico's second-largest city, Guadalajara [1970 population: 1.2 million], far from the dangers of arrest or gunplay afflicting their grow-operations—but coincidentally bringing them into closer contact with their fellow bosses. Late that same year of 1977, the wealthy Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo arranged with major Colombian cocaine-supplier Gonzalo "El Mexicano" Rodríguez Gacha of Medellín to receive some South American consignments in Mexico, where Félix Gallardo's operatives would transship them via his "archipelago of contacts" in Sonora and Baja California into the United States for a commission. Soon, his organization was handling between a ton-and-a-half to two tons of high-value cocaine every month, reaping enormous returns. [See "Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel: Initial Colombian Contacts."]

The exodus of drug lords into Guadalajara—derisively dubbed the *efecto cucaracha* or "cockroach effect" by contemporaries, like the wholesale scurry of a swarm of these insects into hiding once a few have been exposed to light—accelerated after the legendary trafficker Pedro Avilés Pérez, widely known as *León de la Sierra* or "Lion of the Mountains," had his car intercepted while driving toward Aguacalientita by soldiers near the *Y Griega* fork in the road close to the town of Tepuche on Culiacán's outskirts, and was executed along with three companions on the night of September 15, 1978 (eve of Mexico's Independence Day celebrations). The killing of such a wily, veteran operator spread greater alarm among the bosses, so that most had permanently relocated with their families into Jalisco's capital by the end of that same year.

Coincidentally, Washington started to lose interest in its Mexican eradication-efforts, instead becoming more preoccupied with the tons of potent Colombian cocaine reaching Florida as of late 1978 from Pablo Escobar and Carlos Lehrer's Medellín Cartel, representing a much greater public-health threat. Mexican production of marijuana and heroin consequently resurged as of 1979, because of this American

disengagement, which—coupled with a redirection of more and more Colombian loads through Mexico—would lead to a trafficking boom.

Emergence of the Guadalajara Cartel (ca. 1980–1981)

In order to minimize frictions so that all might prosper from this richer traffic, the influential Félix Gallardo joined with fellow bosses Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo—soon to become known as the *Rey del Oro Blanco* or "King of the White Gold" because of his own cocaine dealing—and Rafael Caro Quintero to create an informal coalition and better coordinate traffic by defining gang-territories, drawing in additional regional bosses such as Manuel "El Cochiloco" Salcido Uzeta, the brothers Juan José and Emilio Quintero Payán, Pablo Acosta Villarreal, Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García so as to regulate these far-flung operations. The name "Guadalajara Cartel" was not immediately adopted, as each founding member retained command over his respective group. The resultant pioneering affiliation would not only be similar to the existing Colombian cartels, but also to the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC), which had begun flexing its collective will around this same time by driving up international oil prices.

As the wealthiest member already dealing with a Colombian supplier, Félix Gallardo was regarded informally as its *padrino* or "godfather." Although some clashes would inevitably occur and the Guadalajara Cartel could impose its will through armed actions, it was nowhere near as aggressive or ruthless as future organizations would become. Internal transactions usually consisted of temporary partnerships formed to take advantage of business opportunities: Caro Quintero, for example, persuading two-dozen Guadalajara Cartel partners—big, medium, and small operators—to pool their resources and jointly finance the huge marijuana-plantations that he began establishing in remote pockets throughout northern Mexico during the early 1980s, an investment which was to end badly.

Fatal Act (1982–1985)

Early in 1982, a five-man Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) team headquartered in the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara launched Operation "Godfather"—a protracted investigation intended to gather intelligence about the narcotics operations being furtively directed by Félix Gallardo, who to all outward appearances was a successful businessman and owner of multiple hotels, restaurants, boutiques, properties, cattle ranches, etc., often mentioned in society pages. Although unsuccessful in penetrating his cover, the energetic and venturesome DEA agent Enrique Camarena nonetheless spent the next couple of years unmasking major marijuana-grows near the U.S. border being financed by Caro Quintero and his consortium of Guadalajara Cartel investors. [For greater details on this American agent's activities, see "Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. 'Kiki': Intelligence Work in Mexico."]

When one such sprawling complex was raided outside Fresnillo, Zacatecas, on May 28, 1984, 20 tons of marijuana and 117 low-level employees were lost, and many expensively equipped grow-farms were confiscated. Caro Quintero and his partners angrily pressed their police informants as to which DEA agent had been responsible for this intelligence coup. A second raid on another vast operation radiating out from the hamlet of Búfalo in southern Chihuahua on November 9, 1984, proved to be much

more costly, scattering thousands of field-hands and destroying between 5,000 and 10,000 tons of high-quality seedless marijuana with an estimated street-value of $2.5 billion. An enraged Caro Quintero was given Camarena's name by the end of January 1985 and had him abducted off the street on February 7 for interrogation.

Various Guadalajara Cartel associates assumed that Caro Quintero intended to "take care" of this DEA agent by either scaring or bribing him, but instead—high on cocaine—the incensed drug-boss tortured Camarena to death over the next two days, having his dismembered corpse buried outside Guadalajara while he fled into hiding. The American administration began to exert enormous pressure on Mexico to locate their missing agent, so that worried cartel-partners fabricated a diversion with compliant *judicial* officers to have Camarena's body disinterred and "found" on the Bravo drug-gang's ranch in La Angostura, Michoacán, on March 5, 1985—a ploy which fooled no one.

Dissolution (1985–1989)

Sickened by the brutality of Camarena's death and exasperated by the lack of any arrests two weeks after his abduction, President Ronald Reagan redoubled the economic pressure on Mexico, so that unfamiliar military and police units—whose commanders were unknown to Guadalajara Cartel leaders and thus unsusceptible to bribes or threats—began flooding into Jalisco to mount a wholesale investigation into their entire criminal syndicate, by conducting dragnets and making mass-arrests. Even former military and police collaborators turned against the cartel. Their informal association withered under such bruising scrutiny, members no longer able to avoid arrests or convictions, so that they fled from the city, severing their close affiliations.

Caro Quintero was arrested in Costa Rica on April 4, 1985, and extradited next day to Mexico, where he would provide such useful revelations that his high-ranking colleague Ernesto Fonseca could be apprehended three days later in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. The "godfather" Félix Gallardo remained at large until April 8, 1989, when he too was betrayed and seized, deciding to divide up his cartel's regional components among diverse subordinates. Manuel "El Cochiloco" Salcido—last of the Guadalajara Cartel founders—was shot to death when his vehicle was cut off by two others at an intersection in downtown Guadalajara on October 9, 1991, and "eight men armed with R-15 and AK-47 rifles" (believed to be hired Colombian assassins) pumped more than 50 rounds into him.

See also: Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki"; Caro Quintero, Rafael; *Cochiloco*; "Condor," Operation; *Derecho de piso*; Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel.

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Guiso—see "Body Disposals"

Gulf Cartel (1987–Present). One of Mexico's oldest and most resilient criminal organizations, its strength long derived from its strategic position directly on the Texas border, permitting easy access for drug exports and weapons imports.

Origins under Juan Nepomuceno Guerra (1930s–1986)

This syndicate's roots can be traced back to the 1930s, when a 14-year-old operator named Juan Nepomuceno Guerra Cárdenas joined his brothers Arturo and Roberto in smuggling whiskey and tequila into Prohibition-era America, and bringing back consumer goods which commanded high prices in Mexico's black market. This budding crime-boss's activities would eventually come to include smuggling undocumented aliens and dealing in contraband cigarettes, stolen cars, gambling, prostitution, firearms, etc. Guerra also nurtured his illicit businesses by bribing pliant local policemen and minor bureaucrats, his relationships with two influential union-bosses proving especially useful to his small smuggling enterprise: Agapito Hernández Cavazos, leader of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos or "Confederation of Mexican Workers" (CTM)—whose vast membership included the transport workers' union—and Pedro Pérez Ibarra, state director for all unionized customs-officers in neighboring Nuevo León. By 1963, Juan N. Guerra was able to get his brother Roberto appointed as Tamaulipas' *fiscal* or "district attorney."

At the prompting of his ambitious young nephew Juan García Ábrego, Guerra allowed for an expansion to include more remunerative shipments of Mexican marijuana and heroin as of the early 1970s, which in turn allowed him to finance more highly-placed politicians, such as Enrique Cárdenas González, the corrupt PRI governor of Tamaulipas from 1975–1981, as well as the fixer Raúl Salinas Lozano—father of Mexico's future president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Although still only a medium-sized border operation, Guerra and García's well-connected *Grupo de Matamoros* nonetheless became sufficiently profitable for his nephew to consider handling even more expensive Colombian cocaine transshipments as of 1987, using their existing network of experienced smuggling partners throughout Tamaulipas—a sparsely populated border-state with a lengthy, unpatrolled coastline and multiple access-points into the American market.

Emergence as Gulf Cartel under Juan García Ábrego (1987–1996)

By now infirm and wheelchair-bound, Guerra left day-to-day management to his nephew and chosen successor García Ábrego, who would follow up his profitable arrangement with the Medellín Cartel by negotiating an even better deal with the rival Cali Cartel as of 1992, so that income soared. What had by then become known as the *Cártel de Tamaulipas* would become increasingly referred to as the *Cártel del Golfo* or "Gulf Cartel," with its sphere-of-influence radiating into neighboring Nuevo León and Veracruz.

This success was abruptly interrupted when García Ábrego was captured in Nuevo León by federal agents on January 14, 1996. Because he had claimed years earlier not to have been born in Tamaulipas, but rather in La Paloma, Texas, the Mexican government quickly extradited this "American citizen" to stand trial in the United States. His successor, chosen from among various claimants by García Ábrego's trusted lieutenant Malherbe de León, was to be Hugo Baldomero Medina Garza—son of a successful trucking-family, known as the *Señor de los Tráilers* or "Lord of the Trailers" for using these vehicles to transport huge loads of marijuana and cocaine through Mexico to be smuggled into the United States. Other challengers soon emerged, though: Malherbe would be apprehended in Mexico

City on February 26, 1997, while the Lord of the Trailers was badly wounded by a shot to the face during a botched abduction on April 17, 1997, after which a full-scale succession struggle ensued. [For greater details on the Gulf Cartel's emergence, see "García Ábrego, Juan."]

Zenith under Osiel Cárdenas Guillén (1999–2003)

In late June 1999, the 32-year-old Osiel Cárdenas Guillén laid claim to the Gulf Cartel leadership by treacherously murdering his older partner, Ángel Salvador "El Chava" Gómez Herrera. However, his title was still threatened by other claimants, so that Cárdenas raised an elite paramilitary company of Army deserters (soon to become known as the Zetas), tapping into the cartel's ample resources to finance the training and arming of these gunmen with the latest military-grade weaponry available through Texas—in the process discovering the strategic advantage of amassing stockpiles of firearms and ammunition, as well as a lucrative sideline in selling guns at substantial markups throughout Mexico, both of which would become backbones of Gulf Cartel operations. His subordinates maintained their own *sicario* contingents, such as the "Sierras" and "Tangos" to guard airstrips, drug shipments, stash houses, smuggling runs, etc. But the Zetas, with their advanced intelligence-gathering capabilities and formidable arsenals, would allow Cárdenas to expand the Gulf Cartel's reach by seizing the border-city of Nuevo Laredo in the spring of 2002—and when the Milenio and Sinaloa Cartels united to contest this expansion, to send hit squads deep into Michoacán and Guerrero on retaliatory raids.

Drug flights, meanwhile, continued to land in Tamaulipas, a contemporary observer asserting that the Gulf Cartel was "responsible for thirty percent of the cocaine sold in the United States market." A statement by a government informant in April 2003 described how Cali Cartel intermediaries based in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, would receive purchase-orders and have corresponding loads shipped from Colombia to either Coatzacoalcos or Chetumal, Quintana Roo, on the Gulf Coast; as well as Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, or other destinations in Guerrero and Michoacán controlled by Carlos Alberto "El Tísico" Rosales Mendoza on the Pacific coast, from where they would be flown aboard light aircraft or driven in tractor-trailers under the supervision of Manuel Arcidires García (oftentimes escorted by Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" units) to be warehoused in Tampico, Reynosa, and Matamoros. Upon reaching the Río Bravo's southern shores, Osiel's brother Homero "El Majadero" Cárdenas would direct the actual smuggling across the border, to be forwarded on to major distribution-hubs in Houston and Atlanta.

Earthy and coarse, the mercurial Osiel Cárdenas was a popular cartel leader, celebrating his *éxitos empresariales* or "business successes" with extravagant parties at which late-model cars, gaudy jewelry, and wads of money would be freely handed out among subordinates. He was also known for being hot-tempered and impulsively cruel. It came as a shock when 100 GAFE special-forces and 50 AFI agents stormed his home on March 14, 2003, taking the youthful drug-lord in spite of fierce resistance from his Zeta bodyguards. [A large Sinaloan hit-squad sent by "El Chapo" Guzmán simultaneously attacked the residence of Osiel's brother and second-in-command "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas in Los Arcos Township, Nuevo León, briefly

capturing him before being annihilated by a Zeta counterattack.]

Troubled Tenure under Tony Tormenta (2003–2007)

Gulf Cartel operations were not adversely affected by its leader's removal, day-to-day management being temporarily assumed by Tony Tormenta and "El Coss" Costilla, while the incarcerated Osiel Cárdenas was soon able to apply his immense wealth toward continuing to run the business himself from inside La Palma or Altiplano Penitentiary by using dozens of Nextel cell-phones and daily visits from his lawyers to convey his directives. Sensing weakness, the Sinaloa Cartel launched an all-out offensive in early 2005 to reclaim Nuevo Laredo, leading to two years of debilitating warfare. The Zetas successfully resisted this onslaught, but at a cost of vastly escalating their numbers through indiscriminate recruitments to accommodate career criminals, convicts, and other unstable elements.

Once Osiel Cárdenas was extradited to the United States in January 2007, and a truce was signed with the Sinaloans that same May, unemployed Zetas—indifferently managed by their young, uneducated commander Heriberto Lazcano—would test Tony Tormenta's brittle leadership by unilaterally conquering territories as far south as Guatemala to exploit for themselves. However, according to official assessments from the Federal Attorney-General's Office (PGR), the Gulf Cartel still remained the second wealthiest and most powerful cartel in Mexico, because of its bedrock drug-trafficking and gunrunning operations in Tamaulipas, anchored by its border strongholds at Matamoros and Reynosa.

Project "Reckoning" (September 2008)

Some insight into the Gulf Cartel's reach was exposed when the U.S. Attorney-General Michael B. Mukasey and DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart announced on September 17, 2008, that 175 individuals had been arrested over a two-day span on drug-importation indictments handed down by the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia, in a coordinated sweep involving hundreds of federal, state, and local law-enforcement officers throughout the United States and Italy. These suspects were identified as "Consolidated Priority Organization Targets" (CPOTs), a designation reserved for significant traffickers, accused of:

> *. . . the transportation of multi-ton quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and marijuana from Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, and Mexico into the United States, as well as the distribution of those narcotics within the United States. The Gulf Cartel is also believed to be responsible for laundering multiple millions of dollars in criminal proceeds.*

Other charges included solicitation and conspiracy to kidnap, attempted murders, conspiracy to use a firearm in a violent crime, conspiracy to kill or kidnap in a foreign country, interstate and foreign travel in aid of racketeering, and money laundering.

Project "Reckoning" culminated a 15-month investigation which had included Operations "Dos Equis," "Vertigo," "Stinger," and "The Family" from 200 different law-enforcement agencies, eventually resulting in the arrests of 507 individuals and seizure of $60 million in cash, 16,711 kilograms of cocaine, 1,039 pounds of methamphetamines, 19 pounds of heroin, 51,258 pounds of marijuana, 176

vehicles, and 167 weapons. It was adjudged to have "significantly disrupted [the Gulf Cartel's] U.S. infrastructure," although the federal attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, David E. Nahmias, noted that "Metro Atlanta unfortunately continues to be a major drug-distribution center for the Southeast and beyond."

Arms Importation (2008)

The Gulf Cartel's longtime involvement in gunrunning was also revealed when soldiers raided El Mezquito ranch west of Reynosa in February 2008, turning up a large arsenal of illegal weaponry: 89 assault rifles and 83,355 rounds of ammunition, as well powerful plastic explosives. [A subsequent search also uncovered another weapons-cache in Nuevo Laredo, which included eight military uniforms that could be used by criminals as disguises.] Then on the night of November 6, 2008, soldiers of the 10th Motorized Cavalry Regiment—patrolling through the darkened streets of Reynosa's Colonia Ramón Pérez Garcia—spotted three armed men passing in a car, who fled into a house at 205 Calle Quinta. The soldiers pursued and arrested this trio, discovering an eye-popping stockpile of armaments belonging to the Gulf Cartel, which included:

- seven powerful Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifles
- 288 assault rifles, mostly AK-47s and AR-15s
- 14 Fabrique Nationale (FN) Herstal 5.7×28 mm. semiautomatic pistols, known as *mata policías* or "cop killers"
- two South African Mikor multiple grenade-launchers
- one M72 LAW rocket-launcher
- almost 300 grenades of various calibers and configurations
- more than 500,000 rounds of live ammunition, etc.

This staggering haul of military-grade firearms represented but a small fraction of the Gulf Cartel's reserves, and heightened the Mexican government's unease at the volume of potent weaponry being smuggled in from the United States. The seizure also led to the arrest of Jaime "El Hummer" González Durán at his home next day in Fraccionamiento Las Quintas.

Rupture with the Zetas (December 2008–January 2010)

The mounting dissatisfaction between the Gulf Cartel and its ever-stronger and more independent Zeta paramilitary force—many of whose ill-disciplined members objected to their limited access to the rich flow of Colombian cocaine monopolized by the cartel, as well as bearing the brunt of any fighting to the benefit of their bosses, without commensurate rewards, only multi-million dollar contributions—was matched by the leadership's disapproval of their subordinates' unauthorized forays and conquests, senselessly cruel kidnappings and extortions of civilians, as well as fears of a possible mutiny. By December 2008, 33-year-old Zeta commander Heriberto Lazcano began to suspect that his own betrayal was being engineered, warning a Gulf Cartel intermediary that if he were ever apprehended through treachery, "then an internal war would begin between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel, which the Gulf Cartel could not win."

This uncomfortable partnership continued to unravel, until finally Lazcano's lieutenant Sergio "El Concorde" Peña Mendoz was abducted off a street in the Gulf Cartel stronghold of Reynosa by *sicarios*

under Samuel (Metro 3) Flores Borrego on January 18, 2010, being closely interrogated to determine where his loyalties might lie—and when El Concorde refused to abjure the Zetas, he was brutally beaten and killed. Furious, Lazcano sent a *narcomensaje* to the Gulf Cartel leadership which read:

> *Send us the murderers of my friend, sons of whores. You have until January 25th* [2010] *to do so. If you don't cooperate, there shall be war.*

When the Gulf Cartel failed to respond, the Zetas covertly dispatched several hit-squads into Reynosa on January 30, 2010, who murdered 16 *sicarios* by way of revenge. [For the specific circumstances surrounding this rupture, see "Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto: Narrow Escapes and Mounting Suspicion" et seq.]

Civil War and Death of Tony Tormenta (March 2010–November 2011)

Hostilities between the two groups erupted in March 2010, a bitter struggle ensuing for control over the drug-trafficking routes through the region known as the Frontera Chica, companies of gunmen clashing repeatedly around Mier, Camargo, Guerrero, Miguel Alemán, and San Fernando, soon spilling over into Tampico and northern Veracruz. Since each side recognized the importance of their opponents' flow of moneymaking loads, and were familiar with their traffic patterns after years of association, ambushes and hijackings became a tactical priority. In larger cities, street battles and violence flared up and died down sporadically over the next couple of years, one shell-shocked local reporter describing an:

> *. . . "ebb and flow" throughout 2010 of "big acts of violence, followed by spillover violence over the next few days, followed by an Army or Marinos counter-operation that would capture and kill a lot of criminals—Zetas most of the time, and every now and then a big-time Zeta cell-leader or* jefe de plaza *would get killed or captured.*

But for civilians and civic authorities, this cycle of "violence never really calmed down." Another young journalist named Alejandro Valencia and his cameraman were struck by the combatants' boldness; upon first entering Reynosa at midday on March 3, 2010, their vehicle was cut off by a column of seven black Chevy Escalade SUVs bearing black-clad gunmen, which he later recalled as:

> *. . . an apparition like a dragon, dangerous and seductive. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. The letters "CdG" had been etched in white paint into the windshields . . . The gray Cherokee at the head of this column featured a license-plate with this same insignia, like any other customized design seen on licenses in different states throughout the country.*

When the menacing black-clad gunmen alighted, he furthermore noticed that the letters "CdG" were also displayed in white on their bulletproof vests.

But eventually, 48-year-old cartel co-leader Tony Tormenta—after three-way shootouts on Matamoros' streets between naval special-forces, Zetas, and Gulf Cartel gunmen had left four-dozen people dead on November 5, 2010—was located that same afternoon by a *marino* strike-team, ensconced within a small private residence with four *sicario* gunmen in downtown Colonia Centro. A firefight erupted outside this building around 3:00 p.m., while scores of Tormenta's *Escorpiones* bodyguards rushed in their pickups to the periphery, hoping to use commandeered vehicles and rooftop sharpshooters to divert the naval

attackers and give their boss an opportunity to escape. But more and more tough *marinos* continued to pour into the area, their numbers eventually swelling to 180 naval special-forces, backed by 480 soldiers and policemen, plus three helicopters and 17 armored vehicles. Tormenta and his four-man security detail were dead by 5:35 p.m., along with three Navy men. [And despite the audible bursts of heavy-caliber gunfire, citywide closure of schools and businesses, plus stoppage of all traffic on three of the four international bridges leading across the river into Brownsville, Matamoros' media avoided any mention of this violence or Tormenta's death because of menacing phoned threats from the Gulf Cartel.]

Twenty days later, a naval assault-force furthermore intercepted this dead leader's 23-year-old son—Ezequiel "El Junior" Cárdenas Rivera—while he was trying to flee a private party at a home on Álvaro Obregón Street, in three cars along with a significant portion of the cartel leadership: José de Jesús "El Chuy" García Hernández, that city's 32-year-old *plaza* boss; 37-year-old Erasmo "El Checo" García Galván, a major smuggler; as well as two cartel "accountants," 43-year-old René Alberto "El Amable" Munguía Elizondo and 49-year-old Javier Enrique "El Contador" Farías García.

Decline and Near Defeat (December 2011–February 2015)

Tormenta was nominally succeeded by Mario Alberto (M-1) or "El Gordo" Cárdenas Guillén—younger brother of Osiel Cárdenas—but his lack of desire and abilities would soon reduce him to reluctant command of the Rojos faction in Reynosa, being superseded in the cartel hierarchy by "El Coss" Costilla. Because of the Gulf Cartel's depleted strength, the latter felt obliged to forge an alliance with La Familia Michoacana, creating a coalition tentatively dubbed the Nueva Federación, which at least secured a reinforcement of scores of *michoacano* squads to serve as additional Gulf Cartel gunmen. Early in 2011, they even launched a counteroffensive targeting municipal and rural policemen throughout Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, most of whom were working for the Zetas. But in addition to battling federal forces and the faltering Zetas, an internal conflict finally erupted after the Metros leader in Matamoros, Samuel Flores Borrego, was assassinated on orders from Juan Reyes (R-1) Mejía González and Rafael Cárdenas Vela of the Rojos of Reynosa on September 2, 2011.

Gulf Cartel losses multiplied as naval special-forces seized a major distribution warehouse in General Bravo, Nuevo León, on August 21, 2012, as well as capturing its *plaza* boss, Lauro (M-33) Tijerina Murrieta, and three subordinates. "El Gordo" Cárdenas was taken shortly thereafter in Altamira on September 3, 2012, while standing outside a building with a "large weapon," as well as "three ammunition clips holding 30 bullets each, [and] two grenades." His interrogation further resulted in Juan Gabriel "Sierra" Montes—another major Gulf Cartel trafficker and leader of its Kalimanes hit-squad—being picked up by *marinos* eight days later in Guadalajara. And finally, "El Coss" Costilla himself was apprehended by 30 naval special-forces on September 12, 2012, in the upscale Lomas de Rosales district of the municipality of Tampico, along with its *plaza* boss and four bodyguards.

On the evening of March 10, 2013, a full-scale battle occurred between Los Metros leader Mario "El Pelón" Ramírez and the dissident Rojos faction led by Michael "El Gringo" Villarreal holding Reynosa

[population: 600,000]. Civic authorities were powerless to prevent roadblocks from appearing, and a three-hour confrontation ensued that evening in the paralyzed city, claiming three-dozen lives by dawn. Galdino (Z-9) Mellado Cruz was also killed by federal security-forces in a vigorous shootout at a residence in the city's Las Fuentes neighborhood on May 9, 2014, grenades exploding and volleys of gunfire being exchanged while Gulf Cartel *sicarios* set up roadblocks and spread road-spikes, so as to impede any military intervention. Mellado was slain inside this property, along with five bodyguards. Days prior to his death, gunfights in Reynosa had left at least 23 dead, including two innocent bystanders, a couple of federal policemen, a soldier, and 18 suspected *sicarios*.

Yet Zeta unity had begun to fracture as well, their organization disintegrating into various contending fragments after the arrest of their last recognized leader, Omar (Z-42) Treviño Morales, on March 4, 2015. Despite their greatly diminished strength and disunity, both sides would continue fighting against each other: as recently as the morning of January 9, 2019, authorities searching for a missing man stumbled upon the remnants of a nocturnal battle between Gulf Cartel and Zeta squads near the lonely hamlet of Refugio Hinojosa outside Ciudad Alemán, Tamaulipas, finding 24 bodies—15 charred beyond recognition—amid a field of burned-out vehicles. And when an Army patrol passed close by that same spot on the highway next day, it was fired upon by a group wearing military-style bullet-proof vests and camouflage clothing—evidently by mistake, as the soldiers promptly killed five of these assailants.

See also: AK-47 Assault Rifle; AR-15 Rifle; Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle; García Ábrego, Juan; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto; *Narcotanques*.

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Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas (1976–2002).

Also known as "Z-1." Special-forces corporal who deserted from the Army to join the Gulf Cartel, and raised a small but formidable cadre of gunmen who would become the infamous Zetas.

Birth and Early Military Career (1976–1996)

Guzman was born into a poor family in the state of Puebla on January 13, 1976, and very little is known about his early life. His service records indicate that upon completing *secundaria* or "junior high school," he enlisted in the peacetime Army as a 16-year-old infantryman with identification number B-9229817 on May 12, 1992, at the Campo Militar "General Pedro María Anaya" Número 18-A in Pachuca, Hidalgo. The teenage recruit remained sufficiently ambitious to complete his *preparatoria* or "senior high school" studies and obtain his diploma over the next couple of years, while serving in the military.

The Zapatista insurrection erupted in Chiapas in January 1994, causing an alarmed Mexican government to modernize many of its services. The Army quickly began to be upgraded and its Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Airmobile Groups" (GAFE) training program was greatly expanded, so as to man ten full new companies. Guzmán had evidently proven so tough and adept with firearms as to be chosen for instruction among the earliest six-month GAFE classes that were started in 1995, although precise details remain vague—his military file [number: 13-2547] having been so heavily redacted that many particulars are today obscured. It can only be confirmed that he seems to have specialized in "counterinsurgency" tactics, so may have served in some such capacity after the Chiapas revolt wound down into an uneasy truce during the spring of 1995, and he was promoted to corporal as of August 1995.

[After later achieving worldwide notoriety as Zeta commander, much speculation would arise about Guzmán's special-forces training, some alleging that he had acquired his skillful gunmanship in the United States or even from Israel's legendary Sayeret Matkal reconnaissance unit, and his terrifying psy-ops tactics from the U.S. School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia—yet neither seems very likely. Such international postings were exclusively reserved for junior officers, and although often erroneously described in the popular press as a second lieutenant, no such rank figures in Guzmán's Army records. His name is moreover not listed in the U.S. Embassy's exhaustive electronic database of visas issued to the 5,000 Mexican military personnel who went to the United States for such training as of 1996. It is more probable that he completed his basic GAFE training in Mexico, was assigned to one of the newly-created special-forces companies, and subsequently received some additional instruction in counterinsurgency tactics from an officer who had been taught at Fort Benning.]

Secondment as a Federal Judicial Agent (1997)

Nonetheless, other events would lead the young commando to an unorthodox assignment, which in turn would launch him into his life of crime. During the spring of 1997, many officers and soldiers were temporarily loaned from their regular duties as replacements for under-strength government agencies. Guzmán was one of 1,000 soldiers—650 of them newly-minted GAFEs—who were transferred to the anti-narcotics prosecutorial branch of the Attorney-General's Office (PGR) known as the Fiscalía Especializada para Atención a los Delitos contra la Salud or "Specialized Prosecutor's Office Regarding Crimes against Public Health" (FEADS). Deputized as federal *judiciales* or "judicial policemen," he and about 350 colleagues were sent north to serve as undercover field-agents based out of the Eighth Military Zone headquarters at Reynosa, with orders to infiltrate drug-smuggling operations along the Tamaulipas-Texas border. [For greater details about this inter-service loan program, see "FEADS."]

In keeping with standard PGR field practice, each of these covert military infiltrators was assigned a code number to maintain radio contact with superiors, consisting of the double-letter "ZZ" followed by successive numerals such as ZZ-1, ZZ-2, etc. A small percentage of these novice operatives—mostly poor, uneducated young men scarcely in their 20s—would be seduced by the bountiful pay and rich

lifestyles afforded by the drug trade, when compared with their own paltry military salaries and impossibility of any social advancement within the class-conscious Mexican Army. One who succumbed early on would be the 22-year-old Guzmán. Years later, a colleague named Mateo Díaz López would describe their joint field-service as follows [PGR/SIEDO/UIEDCS/122/2006]:

> *I was commissioned to carry out intelligence work related to the activities being conducted by said suspects, such as whether they were spending in American dollars, or driving stolen cars, or setting up* tiendas *or "stores"* [i.e., street-level retail drug outlets]*, or if they had any ongoing* jales *or "jobs," with the aim of establishing whether they were mixed up in anything bad and reporting on it; and while engaged in such activities, I came to know Arturo Guzmán Decena in the city of Miguel Alemán, who was operating as* [agent] *"103" in that* plaza*, as well as his commander named Víctor Nazario Castrejón Peña.*
>
> *Noticing my frequent visits, he asked me whether I had been sent to* ponerlos [i.e., "set them up" for an arrest]*; responding in the affirmative, he then asked me what I wanted; I said part of whatever they were taking in, which is how I started doing* jales *with them.*

Guzmán was listed in his military file as having gone AWOL by September 27, 1997, being officially discharged from the Army when formal charges for his "probable desertion" were laid before a military tribunal three days afterward.

Initial Criminal Affiliations (1998–1999)

Several months after his desertion, a report was received by the Sección Segunda or "Second Section" of the Estado Mayor or "High Command" at Sedena headquarters [i.e., the Secretariat of Defense's intelligence branch], indicating that Guzmán had been spotted working in the sparsely-populated border municipality of Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas, as a personal bodyguard for Gilberto "El June" García Mena, the Gulf Cartel underboss for that region. An "extra-urgent" order was therefore issued for the deserter's arrest, so as to be brought before a Fiscalía Militar or "Military Prosecutorial Court," but it was too late: the ex-corporal was already settled into his new life.

"El June" García was an old-school dealer who maintained a low profile with federal and U.S. authorities, despite being locally renowned for moving about 50 tons of marijuana a month through Camargo, Miguel Alemán, and Guardado de Abajo into the United States. A veteran trafficker who had begun his career during the 1970s, García had been incarcerated in 1989 for two years in Topo Chico Prison in Monterrey, emerging to join with his brother Juan Anacleto and nephews to form Los Aerolitos gang and seize control over the smuggling routes running through that region. Too shrewd to risk carrying a firearm (an offense with a much heftier penalty in Mexico than simple drug possession), El June paid Guzmán handsomely to act as his bodyguard, people later recalling the tough young hired gun returning with his boss every couple of weeks from Texas in a pickup truck, surrounded by brown paper shopping-bags stuffed with hundreds of thousands of dollars.

By now, a few other GAFEs and FEADS agents had also heard about Guzmán's well-paid arrangement, so that a handful began seeking him out for similar employment. About eight months after having deserted, Guzmán was joined in García Mena's service during the summer of 1998 by

24-year-old Heriberto Lazcano, who had likewise enlisted at Pachuca, risen to the rank of corporal, received GAFE special-forces training, and been sent north as a temporary FEADS field agent. With a power struggle smoldering between Gulf Cartel factions ever since the arrest of Juan García Ábrego two years earlier, as well as attempted territorial encroachments by adversaries from outside Tamaulipas, this highly-skilled pair of daredevils would find ready work, more than 200 murders being registered in the state that same year, and a similar number in 1999. Even officers from the Policía Ministerial del Estado or "State Ministerial Police" (PME) stationed around Ciudad Miguel Alemán [opposite Roma, Texas], shied away from any direct confrontations with the borderland boss' dangerous young bodyguards.

Guzmán soon came to the attention of Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, one of the claimants to Gulf Cartel leadership at Matamoros, who contracted him at a house in Reynosa in February 1999 to gather about 20 gunmen and murder his rival Rolando "El Rolys [or Rolis]" López Salinas. Backed by Lazcano, Guzmán's attack failed because only the two of them were able to shoot their way into López Salinas's fortified residence on Décima Street in Miguel Alemán, before becoming pinned down by a counter-barrage. Several men were killed until Lazcano finally succeeded in exploding a propane gas-tank with a round, so that he and Guzmán could retreat during the resultant confusion.

They had nonetheless acquitted themselves so bravely during this gun battle that they continued to receive contracts, performing them with great alacrity. In one instance, Guzmán and Lazcano were implicated—along with several other conspirators—in the murder of the corrupt Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" (PJF) *comandante* Jaime Rajid Gutiérrez Arreola on March 21, 1999, in a dispute over money that was settled violently around the kilometer 9 marker of the Reynosa-to-Camargo highway near the *ejido* or "communal farm" at Cavazos, so that an arrest order for homicide and organized-crime activities was issued in both their names.

Murder of "El Chava" Gómez (June–July 1999)

Having successfully carried out several targeted killings that won the esteem of Osiel Cárdenas, the 23-year-old Arturo Guzmán accompanied his boss when he traveled during the summer of 1999 to his La Trementina Ranch in Tomatlán, Jalisco, along with three other companions. After a few days, Cárdenas and his party visited a luxury penthouse in Guadalajara, from where the boss phoned his business partner Ángel Salvador "El Chava" Gómez Herrera, who was planning an elaborate baptism ceremony in Tuxpan, Veracruz, as godfather for the infant daughter whom Cárdenas had conceived with his mistress, Liliana Dávila González. Cárdenas informed El Chava that he might not be able to attend, as he was recuperating from plastic surgery, and his fellow trafficker wished him a speedy recovery.

After returning to La Trementina, Cárdenas contacted El Chava again several days later, and they agreed to meet in late June 1999 at the small Gulf port of El Mezquital in Tamaulipas, the latter arriving from Tuxpan aboard one of his smuggling "fast-boats." Cárdenas, meanwhile, was driven from Tomatlán in a Dodge Durango, accompanied solely by principal lieutenant Víctor Manuel "El Meme" Vázquez Mireles and Guzmán, meeting the would-be godfather

at the Mezquital rendezvous. Amid effusive greetings, the unsuspecting "Chava" Gómez climbed into the Durango's front passenger-seat, with Guzmán seated behind him. After a few minutes, Cárdenas signaled his henchman, who fired a bullet into the back of El Chava's head; several of his bodyguards were simultaneously being killed outside, while the remainder surrendered.

El Chava's corpse was then left posed with a gun in his right hand in a lonely pasture near El Caracol Ranch (where Cárdenas had grown up), while the boss was driven swiftly by Guzmán back to Tomatlán to begin cementing his Gulf Cartel takeover. Several more days would elapse before El Chava's decaying remains were found, bloated and burst by the intense summer heat, with scavengers feasting upon his carcass. In a culture where the deceased are traditionally displayed in open caskets before their funerals, such horrid disfigurement was considered wantonly cruel, so that Cárdenas would become widely despised throughout Mexico as the *Mata Amigos* or "Friend Killer."

Recruiting the First Zetas (2000)

A second assassination-attempt against "El Rolys" López Salinas—now one of Cárdenas' main remaining challengers for Gulf Cartel leadership, and suspected of having allied himself with the emergent Sinaloa Cartel under Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán to contest for this position—was presumably led by Guzmán on September 22, 2000, although this attack likewise failed and only wounded López Salinas' chauffeur. However, his alignment with the Sinaloans was seemingly confirmed when six *sicarios* were arrested five days later after a heavy gun-battle against state ministerial policemen in Ciudad Camargo, and it was discovered that these hired interlopers had been brought in by El Rolys from Culiacán and Guamúchil.

Anticipating further trouble, Cárdenas approached his trusted young subordinate once more and asked Guzmán to organize a deadly paramilitary company composed of the "best armed men," rather than just brutish *pistoleros* or "pistol men"—to which the ex-GAFE replied that such marksmen could only come from the Army. His boss thereupon instructed Guzmán to recruit more disgruntled soldiers, backed by the Gulf Cartel's financial resources. An informant later disclosed that the charismatic ex-corporal's initial recruitment efforts drew men away from the Army garrison at Reynosa—which at that time comprised the 15th and 70th (Puebla) Infantry Battalions, and 15th Motorized Cavalry Regiment—as well as from the elite Brigada de Fusileros Paracaidistas or "Fusilier Parachutists Brigade."

Proceeding methodically, Guzmán next focused on units that had been in Hidalgo while he was stationed there during the early 1990s, and so still included some members known to him, as well as companies from his home state of Puebla. Most volunteers were won over by generous cartel bounties—*cañonazos de dólares* or "cannon volleys of dollars," as they were jestingly called. And although acknowledged as a very brave fighter and charismatic leader of men, Guzmán lacked the necessary organizational skills of a military professional, so that Cárdenas also assigned three ex-Army officers to help marshal a cohesive force.

Guzmán's recruitment efforts were furthermore inadvertently abetted when the last 100 GAFEs who had been loaned out as temporary FEADS agents returned to their regular duties, and were paraded at their San Miguel de los Jagüeyes training base

near Mexico City in early December 2000. A general officer addressed these assembled troops, informing them that because of their ancillary service, those who wished to resign from the Army would be given an honorable discharge and severance pay with a bonus. More than half accepted and parted on good terms—but some months later, intelligence officers at the Eighth Military Zone headquarters in Reynosa began noticing several of their names reappearing in early 2001, as members of a shadowy new criminal gang on the Frontera Chica between Nuevo Laredo and Miguel Alemán, calling themselves Zetas because of the distinctive "Z" code numerals used in their radio communications.

Enhanced Training (2001)

Guzmán began testing out his new contingent by personally leading a small Zeta hit-squad in the failed assassination of another competing trafficker out of Monterrey—Edelio "El Yeyo" López Falcón, a Juárez Cartel affiliate known as the *Señor de los Caballos* or "Lord of the Horses" because of his love of thoroughbred racehorses—at 4:00 a.m. on May 13, 2001, after a performance by the famed *ranchero* singer Vicente Fernández in a traditional wooden *palenque* or "cockfighting pit" at the Expo of Monterrey. Guzmán's second strike fared somewhat better, when he led 25 Zetas disguised in black GAFE uniforms in a bold raid to break a colleague out of confinement at the State Ministerial Police headquarters in Matamoros on June 20, 2001. Witnesses stated that these assailants wielded high-powered AK-47s, AR-15s, and a tear-gas grenade launcher—but although successful in rescuing their comrade, three raiders were subsequently caught and wound up in a maximum-security facility in Mexico City. Incensed, the Zetas retaliated by murdering the State Ministerial Police commander and his driver on July 9, 2001, riddling their vehicle while parked outside Matamoros' Las Escolleras Restaurant.

According to file number PGR/SIEDO/UEIDSC/001/2003, Angélica Lagunas Jaramillo—Guzmán's future mother-in-law—was visited in her store by Osiel Cárdenas along with Heriberto Lazcano and a dozen Zetas on August 16, 2001, to demand that she pay a *derecho de piso* fee in order to remain in business. Cárdenas subsequently threatened her with death if she did not agree to use her name in buying safe houses for his cartel, which is when she met Guzmán, in overall charge of acquiring such properties.

But Cárdenas had been displeased with his elite *sicarios*' disjointed performances, and so in September 2001 ordered Guzmán's entire small band (now numbering more than 40 Zetas) to undergo a two-month refresher course in military discipline, coordinated combat-tactics, and advanced-weaponry tutorials at a couple of his lonely rural ranches. Federal authorities learned of a shootout in Monterrey on October 30, 2001, that involved some of these trainees, and began tailing suspects so as to learn more about their activities. The PGR consequently rolled up some drug consignments passing through Querétaro, Veracruz, and Tamaulipas in mid-November 2001, which revealed to them that Guzmán had not only been recruiting rank-and-file personnel but also communication and intelligence specialists who would prove to be even more valuable to his criminal efforts: in particular, six ex-members of the 104º Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales or "104th GAFE" company who had served that unit in radio interception and counterintelligence capacities. Their expertise, coupled with Cárdenas' willingness to

purchase the most sophisticated electronic equipment available, would ensure that the Zetas enjoyed a tactical advantage over the military, police, and rival gangs for years to come.

Assault on Nuevo Laredo (February–November 2002)

By early 2002, the national magazine *Proceso* was receiving multiple reports from frightened civilians about long, military-style columns of identical black pickups roaring down highways in Tamaulipas, manned by 50 or more heavily-armed gunmen wearing matching black uniforms complete with helmets, balaclavas, bullet-proof vests, and combat boots—appearing to all the world like Army special-forces patrols, except for the "Z" stenciled prominently in white on their door panels. The first major deployment of Guzmán's company would occur next month, when a two-ton Gulf Cartel cocaine shipment through Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, was almost treacherously seized by local gang-leader Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez—despite Cárdenas having paid him the requisite *derecho de piso* or "transit fee."

Infuriated by such double-dealing, the Gulf Cartel boss ordered Guzmán's entire Zeta company to gather at a Reynosa safe-house and surreptitiously infiltrate Nuevo Laredo, to mount a surprise retaliatory strike next month within El Chacho's own stronghold. Regardless of being heavily outnumbered by García Sánchez's 300 or so street-thugs, the 50–60 Zetas' unsuspected intelligence prowess gave them the decisive tactical advantage of being able to pinpoint their foes' concentrations and movements, emerging out of darkness to attack vulnerable targets. Guzmán—whatever his shortcomings as an organizational manager—proved to be a fierce and inspirational field-commander, an informant later describing how during the initial phase of this hit-and-run fighting in March 2002, he and Lazcano personally "hunted" a band of four municipal policemen, abducting and torturing them to death, before burning their remains in 200-liter steel drums.

To make up for their lack of numbers, Guzmán's men were equipped with the best military-grade machineguns, assault rifles, and grenade launchers, providing such formidable firepower that they did not fear encountering rival gangs, policemen, or even Army units. He also encouraged his Zetas to visit psy-op terrors upon their opponents, inflicting cruel injuries on captives before inevitably executing them (so as to prevent their own limited strength from becoming known), which in turn spread fear more widely among government functionaries, policemen, journalists, and the public at large. This Zeta offensive's opening round climaxed when Guzmán personally led a *comando* or "squad" that abducted El Chacho outside his safe-house in distant Monterrey along with four companions at dawn on May 13, 2002, during which his opponent's top *gatillero* or "trig-german," Juvenal Torres Sánchez, was also shot dead in an upstairs bedroom. García's mutilated remains were found next day, washed ashore in a *brecha* or "break" of the Río Bravo near Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas.

Notwithstanding the reinforcements that had been sent in support of Los Chachos by the Juárez and Milenio Cartels, Guzmán and his elusive Zeta contingent dominated Nuevo Laredo by the end of May 2002, although they were too few in number to occupy a city of 308,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, they roamed it at will, materializing out of the night to pick off hapless targets

and sow dread, bringing rival trafficking to a halt. Local newspapers reported that between April and November 2002, at least 24 people were abducted in Nuevo Laredo and dozens more killed—most by a well-organized group "dressed in black and carrying high-powered weapons, who intercept their victims in the streets or remove them from their homes, to then make them disappear."

Death (November 2002)

However, one of the few successes scored by the authorities against the victorious Zetas occurred by chance in Matamoros on the evening of November 21, 2002, when a relaxing Arturo Guzmán—after downing several strong drinks and a few lines of cocaine—left the Pisa y Corre Restaurant to visit his mistress, Ana Bertha González Lagunas, at her nearby Herrera Street home. He ordered his security detail to block off her street and divert traffic, but an anonymous tip was subsequently phoned in by an irate neighbor to UEDO [the Federal Unidad Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Organized-Crime Unit," rather than to the ineffectual municipal police] so that a party of soldiers and federal agents rushed to this scene.

Opinion throughout the Army—even among officers or soldiers with corrupt tendencies—held that forsaking one's oath of loyalty to become a "narco mercenary" put such turncoats beyond the pale, so that they regarded deserters like Guzmán as traitors and were eager for a showdown. Half-drunk and half-drugged, Guzmán proved uncharacteristically inept that night, firing wildly until he was struck down by four rounds (one of which shredded his left arm). After his death, local newspapers reported that flowers were left on the sidewalk outside the Pisa y Corre Restaurant and at his gravesite, accompanied by a note that read: "You will always be in our hearts. From your family, Los Zetas."

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel; FEADS; GAFE; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto.

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Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo" (1957–Present).

Longstanding Sinaloa Cartel leader, a small upstart organization that he built into the world's most powerful crime syndicate, in the process escaping twice from maximum-security prisons.

Birth and Difficult Childhood (1957–1972)

Born in La Tuna, a tiny impoverished hamlet in the remote, mountainous municipality of Badiraguato, Sinaloa, on April 4, 1957, he was the eldest of seven children sired by Emilio Guzmán Bustillos and María Consuelo Loera Pérez—his sisters being Armida and Bernarda, plus younger brothers Miguel Ángel, Aureliano, Arturo, and Emilio. The infant Joaquín struggled to correctly pronounce his childhood nickname of

Chaparro or "Shorty," shortening it into *Chapo* and remaining so known into adulthood [although his preferred nickname was simply El Tío or "The Uncle"].

Young Joaquín only ever received a third-grade education from itinerant teachers—the nearest school being 60 miles away—and was remembered for selling oranges in Badiraguato's market as a boy. His father being an abusive drunkard, as a teenager he also tried to defend his younger siblings against beatings, retreating to the house of his maternal grandmother, Pomposa Pérez Uriarte, whenever these became too violent.

Introduction to the Drug Trade (1972–1980)

At 15 years of age, "El Chapo" learned the rudiments of opium and marijuana cultivation from his *gomero* father, and planted his own small crop with the help of his Beltrán Leyva cousins, launching his drug career. Expelled from his father's home a few years later, young Joaquín lived briefly with his grandfather, before leaving Badiraguato for better prospects elsewhere—through the help of his uncle Pedro Avilés Pérez, a drug-trafficking pioneer.

Not yet 20 years of age, Guzmán first worked for the underboss Jesús Héctor Luis "El Güero" Palma Salazar, transporting drugs and overseeing airplane shipments out of the Sierra Madre to drop-points near the U.S. border. Ambitious, determined, and sober throughout his youth, he regularly pressed his superiors for more work, being serious and self-disciplined, never one to act impulsively. He was also quite willing to work in partnerships, without insisting upon monopolizing leadership.

By the time that Guzmán turned 20 in 1977, he had become sufficiently prosperous from marijuana and opium trafficking as to marry Alejandrina María Salazar Hernández—daughter of one of "El Güero" Palma's associates—in a small ceremony celebrated in the town of Jesús María, Sinaloa (and with whom El Chapo would eventually have five children: Alejandrina Giselle, César, Iván Archivaldo, Jesús Alfredo, and Claudete).

Learning the Business (1981–1988)

Three years later, El Chapo would join the vast multistate organization headed by Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, initially working as this "godfather's" personal chauffeur in 1980 but soon being encouraged to broaden his experience into other facets of the trade. Apparently one of the 24-year-old's initiations was to establish some kind of contact with Colombian cocaine sources: legend has it that Guzmán's first attempt ended in embarrassing failure, when he sent his nephew Renato to Barranquilla in 1981 to make an anticipatory purchase, only to have his relative defrauded by some wily *marimberos* [a Colombian expression dating from the 1970s, for persons involved in the cultivation and sale of marijuana].

El Chapo's follow-up visit to Barranquilla proved more successful, as—thanks to the assistance of Francisco Iván "Pacho" Cifuentes Villa, a smuggling pilot for Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel—the young Mexican visitor gained access to that syndicate's upper circles, including Félix Gallardo's original Colombian supplier, José Gonzalo "El Mexicano" Rodríguez Gacha. These in turn would allow El Chapo to begin establishing a working relationship with the cartel lieutenant Fabio Ochoa Vásquez, and later on he met the 32-year-old Escobar himself [whom Guzmán would greatly admire, fondly remembering the many visits which he made to that drug-lord's splendid Nápoles Hacienda].

In 1984, the 27-year-old Guzmán was entrusted with running one of the marijuana grow-farms established by Rafael Caro Quintero's consortium in a sprawling 2,500-acre area that stretched for miles around the lonely hamlet of Búfalo, some 20 miles from Ciudad Jiménez in the municipality of Valle de Allende in Chihuahua—El Chapo's first major managerial job on behalf of the Guadalajara Cartel. When 270 soldiers and 250 federal agents suddenly landed at El Búfalo from a dozen helicopters on the morning of November 9, 1984, slowly fanning out to begin destroying marijuana crops, Guzmán was able to get away—but thousands of field-hands were scattered and some 8,500 tons of high-quality seedless marijuana were destroyed, with an estimated street-value of $2.5 billion.

Independence and First "Narco Tunnel" (1985–1988)

When the Guadalajara Cartel disintegrated next year as a consequence of their senselessly cruel murder of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena in February 1985, "El Chapo"—along with his older partners Adrián Gómez González and Héctor "El Güero" Palma—established their own independent syndicate, quickly taking over various small Sonoran smuggling-routes leading across the Arizona border. Guzmán focused on his task of coordinating imports from Colombia via air and sea—in the process creating his own commercial airline called Aerobastos, to fly loads north out of a leased hangar in Mexico City's airport for cross-border smuggling—while Palma used trailer-trucks and a network of Mexican-American businesses to ensure that these deliveries reached their outlets in California, Chicago, and New Jersey. [El Chapo was assisted in his aerial operations by a young Mexican pilot named Miguel Ángel "El Gordo" Martínez, who had flown alone to Barranquilla in 1986 in hopes of finding a smuggling job, only to return empty-handed several months later—being praised by Guzmán for having the patience to reject bad offers, and who then promptly hired him.]

Within a couple of years of having established their group, El Chapo convinced his partners to finance the professional construction of a border tunnel by the young architect and engineer Felipe de Jesús Corona Verbera. Since their fledgling organization only had limited access to the United States along a narrow stretch of the Arizona border, this first so-called *narcotúnel* originated from a house in the town of Agua Prieta opposite Douglas. At an estimated cost of $1.5 million, Corona designed and built a sophisticated 200-foot tunnel that emerged in a warehouse on the Arizona side. [For more details, see "Tunnels."]

Upon its completion in October 1987, a delighted Guzmán informed his Colombian suppliers "to send all the drugs that they can," who—unaware of his *narcotúnel*'s existence—were astonished at how quickly he could deliver their loads into the United States and bring out multimillion-dollar proceeds, even joking that his nickname should be changed from El Chapo into *El Rápido* or the "Fast One." Such prowess would allow Guzmán to negotiate for more consignments and higher fees, increasing their group's wealth and power. By 1991, it was estimated that "El Gordo" Martínez was managing hundreds of small drug-flights out of South America every year.

Creation of the "Sinaloa Cartel" (*ca.* 1990)

Yet this growth of Guzmán's group would also bring them into conflict with the Arellano crime family, who ran the much bigger

Tijuana Cartel and monopolized the 100 miles of Baja California borderland as far east as Mexicali. They demanded high *derecho de piso* or "transit fees" from those who wished to ship through consignments and brutally punished any trespassers. During the summer of 1989, after being allotted Tecate's *plaza* according to the wishes of the incarcerated Félix Gallardo, El Chapo attempted to open a dialogue with the Arellanos about assuming his title within "their" jurisdiction—but unfortunately his chosen emissary, a close childhood friend and veteran trafficker named Armando "El Rayo" López Esparza, arrived uninvited and drunk with a female consort at the Club Britania in Tijuana, trying to crash the baptismal festivities of Benjamín Arellano's daughter. The violent family enforcer, Ramón Arellano, emerged and shot López in the head, then had his body tossed away on a lonely road. For good measure, he further instructed a hit squad to travel into Sinaloa and kill the deceased's relations, so as to preclude any possible revenge. Guzmán, who had regarded Armando López as "almost a brother," never forgave this callous murder.

Since leaders of other small groups farther south in Sonora and Sinaloa, such as Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, were likewise finding their marijuana and heroin shipments through Baja California overcharged or obstructed by the Arellanos, it was around this time that Guzmán—with his own direct access to a small stretch of Arizona border—proposed to his Sinaloan colleagues that they form a loose *Federación* to assist one another, which would soon become known as the "Sinaloa Cartel" or "Pacific Cartel." Guzmán and Palma found an additional outlet for these extra cargoes by striking a deal with Amado Carrillo Fuentes' Juárez Cartel, who welcomed their business and soon came to admire El Chapo for his efficiency. Guzmán would later claim that there was no such thing as a "Sinaloa Cartel," only various groups cooperating with each other—but given his control over a border-crossing and much more lucrative dealings in Colombian cocaine, the other partners acknowledged his leadership.

Hostilities with the Arellanos (1991–1992)

Ill feelings still lingered against the Tijuana bosses for denial of passage through their self-claimed expanse, so that tensions rose and armed encounters multiplied. Finally, in an effort to avert an all-out war, Benjamín Arellano reluctantly flew to Culiacán during the summer of 1991 for a meeting with El Chapo monitored by the chief of the Federal Judicial Police, General Guillermo González Calderoni—the man designated by Félix Gallardo to mediate the distribution of cartel *plazas*, so that the Arellanos felt constrained to attend. It was agreed that both sides would refrain from doing "anything that creates bad feeling or mistrust," and that the Sinaloan would not be hampered in smuggling shipments across at his assigned Tecate border *plaza*. But only a few weeks later, El Chapo succeeded in persuading González Calderoni—to whom he was steadily paying copious bribes—to appoint Guzmán's own choice as Federal Judicial Police *comandante* in Tijuana, so that some 30 Arellano underbosses came to be arrested over the next few months. Their cartel further suffered an expensive string of cocaine and marijuana interceptions in the United States, suspecting Guzmán of having tipped off the American authorities [a tactic that El Chapo would often employ throughout his career].

The Arellanos therefore convened a second meeting in Culiacán during early 1992, this time hoping to assassinate Guzmán, but

no good chance presented itself. Their feud deepened once the bellicose Ramón Arellano became involved, killings and counter-killings rising, as well as raids and counter-raids against each other's shipments, stash houses, etc. This clandestine warfare became even more personal after two car-bombs were detonated at 5:00 a.m. on May 29, 1992, outside 1483 Chihuahua Street of Culiacán's Fraccionamiento Las Quintas, one of Guzmán's properties. Then in October 1992, a murder attempt narrowly failed to kill him, when he tried to exit one afternoon from Guadalajara's Periférico onto Mariano Otero Avenue—a Dodge Ram cutting off his Oldsmobile Cutlass, and three men (one recognizable as Ramón Arellano) alighting to open fire with AK-47s. El Chapo succeeded in racing past, although his car was struck 12 times.

Guzmán retaliated next month, when he learned that Ramón and Francisco Javier "El Tigrillo" Arellano had spent three days disporting in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, under the protection of Federal *comandante* Adolfo Mondragón Aguirre. A Sinaloan hit-squad attacked while the brothers were partying at 2:30 a.m. in the Krystal Hotel's Christine discothèque on November 8, 1992, a large DINA truck and three SUVs halting outside to disgorge some 50 men armed with AK-47s and AR-15s, wearing dark uniforms and bulletproof vests with the initials "PJF" for Policía Judicial Federal. They double-timed inside and killed six people during an eight-minute exchange of gunfire, which the Arellanos survived by bolting into the bathroom and crawling out through its air-conditioning duct.

Near-Assassination at Guadalajara Airport (May 1993)

Thirsting for revenge, Ramón Arellano sent out retaliatory death-squads until he finally learned in mid-May 1993 that Guzmán would be visiting Guadalajara, so surreptitiously flew into that city with a dozen well-armed *sicarios* on May 18, 1993. Operating from a safe house, Arellano and his gunmen emerged daily in armored vehicles, scouring El Chapo's known haunts over the next five days in a vain effort to find their quarry, whom they learned was being chauffeured in a late-model white Ford Grand Marquis.

Finally giving up on their hunt by the morning of Monday, May 24, 1993, the Tijuana hit-squad was inching through traffic toward Guadalajara's airport shortly after 3:30 that same afternoon, when one carful of assassins spotted Guzmán in a chauffeur-driven green armored Buick, being escorted by a half-dozen bodyguards to catch his own Aeroméxico flight to Puerto Vallarta. By the time that these first surprised Tijuana gunmen alerted their colleagues and broke out their weaponry to pursue, it was a second car of *sicarios* which actually regained contact—closing in upon the wrong vehicle, a chauffeur-driven white Ford Grand Marquis carrying not Guzmán but Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, bishop of Guadalajara. Four overeager Tijuana gangsters ran up behind this car and fired 140 rounds, killing the 66-year-old prelate along with his chauffeur and five innocent bystanders, before melting away into the panicky throngs. Arellano and his remaining *sicarios* boarded their own departing Tijuana flight as scheduled, flying home undetected.

Flight into Central America and Detention (May–June 1993)

In the immediate aftermath of this shooting, Guzmán and his bodyguards crawled on their hands and knees into the terminal, then drove to the Fraccionamiento Bugambilias (about 20 minutes from the airport),

from where they proceeded to one of his many residences at Tonalá on Guadalajara's outskirts. By that same evening of May 24, 1993, the fugitives were headed toward Mexico City in a taxi, being driven overnight to reach the Hotel Flamingo by 3:00 next morning. An infuriated government broadcast a nationwide reward on May 25, 1993, of 15 million new pesos—equivalent to about $5 million—for information leading to the arrest of the chief protagonists involved in this ugly affair: Ramón, Francisco Javier, and Benjamín Arellano Félix of the Tijuana Cartel, and "El Güero" Palma and El Chapo from the Sinaloa Cartel.

Despite being the intended victim and therefore an innocent party to Cardinal Posadas' murder, Guzmán realized he would have to go on the run, fearful about entrusting his fate to colleagues or acquaintances who might rob or denounce him. After hiding out briefly in the Mexico City home of his local underboss, Martín Moreno Valdez, El Chapo and his depleted retinue (joined by Moreno) continued on toward Toluca, where they were met by a police *comandante* who drove them in his Chevrolet Suburban SUV to San Cristóbal de las Casas, then on to a luxurious rural estate that Guzmán owned just outside Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Chiapas. Welcomed by another of his underlings, Manuel Castro Mesa [or Meza], the drug lord and his small band were provided with false papers to cross the border, and El Chapo gathered up $2 million cash for travel expenses.

Believing that their presence might have been detected on May 31, 1993, the fugitives slipped across the nearby border into the town of La Mesilla in the Huehuetenango Department of western Guatemala. Castro Mesa was now accompanying the small group, claiming to have a good working-relationship with a Guatemalan lieutenant-colonel named Carlos Humberto Rosales, which might prove useful. Sometime before June 4, 1993, Guzmán was on the move again, this time proceeding still farther southeast to visit one of his drug operations in the port-city of Acajutla, in El Salvador's Departmento de Sonsonate. Rumors would later assert that he was seen partying wildly one night during this Salvadoran side-trip, cavorting with prostitutes and spending thousands of dollars in drunken debauchery in El Trovador Plaza of the San Jacinto district, in the national capital of San Salvador.

Returning from his Salvadoran excursion, El Chapo—along with his lover, María del Rocío del Villar Becerra, and four travel-companions—spent the night of June 7, 1993, resting comfortably in the Hotel Panamericana in Guatemala City. Intending to resume their travels next day, they were unexpectedly betrayed and arrested on June 8 by Lieutenant-Colonel Rosales, who seized the $1.2 million remaining to Guzmán and prepared to anonymously deliver the runaways to the Mexican government. Moving his prisoners southwest nearer to the border-city of Malacatán in the Department of San Marcos, Rosales struck a deal with a young Guatemalan captain commanding a lowly detachment of *guardias de hacienda* or "treasury agents" and informed his Mexican counterparts in Tapachula to expect their wanted fugitive next day.

Delighted, the Salinas de Gortari administration ordered a trio of Mexican Air Force planes flown into Tapachula overnight, bearing a large delegation of military officers, federal agents, and a paratrooper company, all under the command of Major-General Jorge Carrillo Lea. This officer was surprised when only three battered pickups appeared at the agreed rendezvous on June

9, 1993—the international bridge at Talismán, spanning the Suchiate River—under a young Guatemalan officer who did not give his name. Nevertheless, a haggard Guzmán was hoisted out of a vehicle bed and marched across with his hands tied behind his back to be unceremoniously handed over, along with his five companions. [More than 20 years later, former Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina—while on trial for fraud—would claim to have played a role as a colonel in charge of the D-2 Military Intelligence Department and recently-promoted chief of the presidential staff in arresting the fugitive drug-lord and returning him to Mexico, while rebuffing a $1.5 million bribe from Guzmán; yet contemporary accounts do not mention him or any other Guatemalan military presence at the border exchange.]

During the subsequent flight aboard a Mexican Air Force Boeing 727 to Toluca, El Chapo was interrogated and talked extensively, so that upon their arrival at the Campo Militar Número 1-A, his principal questioner—Brigadier General Guillermo Álvarez Nara, chief of the Military Judicial Police—submitted a report written on four legal-sized pages with *oficio* number 1387, reporting to the Army's general prosecutor what the captive drug-boss had declared.

Imprisonment (1993–2001)

Guzmán was initially jailed in the federal maximum-security Centro de Readaptación Social or "Social Readaptation Center" (CERESO) Number 1 in Almoloya de Juárez, State of Mexico, where he would be tried and eventually sentenced to 20 years and nine months' incarceration for possession of firearms, drug trafficking, criminal association, and bribery, plus complicity in Cardinal Posadas' murder (this latter charge being subsequently dismissed). After an attempted escape, he was transferred to the Puente Grande Number 2 CERESO prison in Zapotlanejo, Jalisco, on November 22, 1995, continuing to direct his cartel operations through his younger brother Arturo "El Pollo" Guzmán Loera, while loyal subordinates Arturo and Héctor Beltrán brought him money-stuffed suitcases to pay bribes and maintain a luxurious lifestyle—including specially-prepared meals, hired musicians, and conjugal visits with his wife, girlfriends, and prostitutes. His longtime friend and ally Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno ensured that his drug consignments continued to reach their destinations in the United States.

After three years' incarceration, El Chapo—downcast as his followers melted away and his power waned—persisted in trying to injure his bitter foes, the Arellanos. One of his representatives contacted the DEA office at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City with an offer, so that its chief of intelligence, Larry Villalobos, and Operations Supervisor Joe Bond disguised themselves as psychologists and surprised the drug lord with an unsupervised visit in October 1998. During their interview, the manipulative Guzmán offered detailed information about the Arellanos' drug and money-laundering operations, in exchange for a promise not to be extradited to the United States. When the DEA agents pointed out that he could simply issue orders to his followers to attack his rivals, El Chapo exclaimed:

> *No, no! What you don't understand, is that I don't have that power anymore. The people that used to work with me left, and are now working for them. It's alright, though. I can't expect them to stay with me, because they have to maintain their families. But I don't have people anymore. I can't have them killed, nor handed over. I do not have that power.*

The DEA agents agreed to present El Chapo's proposal to their superiors, but it was rejected, as they fully expected.

First Prison Escape (January 2001)

On Friday evening, January 19, 2001—less than two months after the PAN reformer Vicente Fox had been inaugurated as president of Mexico—Guzmán escaped from Módulo 3 at Puente Grande, causing some analysts to suggest he was concerned about losing his political influence through the removal of corrupt PRI officials. According to the ensuing board-of-inquiry, a few hours after a prison inspection by the Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos or "National Human-Rights Commission" (CNDH), El Chapo was recorded as "present" during the 9:45 p.m. body-count, then proceeded to the laundry area—where he jumped into a large cart and was concealed beneath clean bedding, to be wheeled from building to building exchanging it for dirty laundry, until the cart moved out of sight of any guards and he emerged to escape. Unsure whether he was even gone, prison officials checked every nook and cranny in the penitentiary over the next four days, until they found his jumpsuit and shoes hidden in its machine shop. The government would subsequently detain 62 prison officials, guards, and trustees as suspected accomplices.

Fugitive and Plotter (February–September 2001)

After his Puente Grande escape, Guzmán was allegedly escorted through the State of Mexico, Mexico City, and Puebla by bribed police officers, vanishing to celebrate for three days straight at his Los Caballeros Ranch in Badiraguato, before starting a series of cross-country trips to reestablish his personal relationships with major drug-lords. First, he met with his fellow Sinaloa Cartel leaders, eager to prove that incarceration had not dulled him. In March 2001, the authorities learned that El Chapo was at a ranch known as Los Limones in Santa Fe, a hamlet in the municipality of Jala in Nayarit, but he managed to escape—reportedly aboard a helicopter furnished by "El Mayo" Zambada—before a military assault-team could arrive.

El Chapo's prison break and subsequent elusiveness would win much public admiration, turning him into a near-mythical figure. His whereabouts became the subject of constant speculation, rumors circulating that he always traveled with a large detail of armed bodyguards (equivalent to those of a head-of-state) and employed a vast surveillance-network and bulletproof cars, aircraft, and all-terrain vehicles to avoid being retaken. Numerous *narcocorridos* were written about his flight and ensuing escapades, performed by such *norteño* music stars as Los Buknas de Culiacán, Canelos de Durango, Las Fieraz, Larry Hernández, Valentín Elizalde, Tucanes de Tijuana, etc.

In reality, Guzmán seemingly lived from June until September 2001 in a safe house in Zinacantepec, State of Mexico, even being spotted on an outing that August near the beautiful La Marquesa National Park west of Mexico City. During the first week of September 2001, federal authorities speculated that he was splitting his time between Toluca and Nayarit, but the fugitive was actually almost caught when a raid on a stash house in Iztapalapa in eastern Mexico City by the Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) on September 7, 2001, caused its denizens to scatter in various vehicles. After a lengthy pursuit of three suspects in one car ended in Taxquena at the southern end of Mexico City, the agents discovered that they had

bagged "El Pollo" Guzmán, El Chapo's younger brother Arturo—but the drug boss himself had also been in one of the other fleeing vehicles, not only getting away, but clearing out of his Zinacantepec safe-house.

Re-creation of "La Federación" (October 2001)

Guzmán eventually convinced 25 drug bosses to hold a summit in October 2001 in Cuernavaca, Morelos, followed by others in Mexico City, during which the charismatic and clever Chapo persuaded them to re-create his old successful affiliation with his fellow Sinaloan bosses that had evolved into the "Sinaloa Cartel," by uniting all of the represented cartels into a Federación to make everyone's operations function more smoothly and profitably. [During the DEA agents' unsupervised visit with Guzmán at Puente Grande in October 1998, he had offered the following idealized description of his old Sinaloan *Federación*: "They were all a group of friends who got on well together, and . . . had everything under control between the various competing states along the border, with several people controlling the border areas."]

In order to revive such an affiliation, each attending syndicate would have to agree to temporarily ease its monopoly over their smuggling routes, making these available to other partners for a modest fee. This strategy would not only diminish costly infighting, but further create better smuggling opportunities—for if the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency should mass men and resources at one particular point-of-entry, the traffickers could quickly divert their shipments onto these newly-available alternate routes and flood across at less well-defended sectors. The Gulf Cartel refused to join Guzmán's new Federación, although—for the common good—it did allow partners to transit along their established routes from Monterrey to Nuevo Laredo for moderate fees.

Pleased with his success, Guzmán dubbed his new association the *Alianza de Sangre* or "Blood Alliance," confiding to a helicopter pilot whom he hired around this time: "Everywhere it is said that I am the boss of the Sinaloa Cartel, but that doesn't exist; my group is called the Alianza de Sangre." ["Chapo doesn't run a very hierarchical cartel—his allies are more like a loose federation of warlords," the analyst Scott Stewart of the intelligence firm Stratfor would later observe. "He isn't always looking over everyone's shoulder, but whenever someone starts to get too big for his britches and pose some sort of leadership challenge, that person suddenly seems to start having problems."]

Offensives against Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, and Ciudad Juárez (2002–2006)

Only the Arellanos' Tijuana Cartel rebuffed his proposal, a decision that would leave them alone and outnumbered against multiple enemies. Guzmán's Federation quickly attacked their outposts, and El Chapo supplemented the efforts of his hundreds of *sicarios* under the ferocious Arturo Beltrán by sending a stream of damaging tips into the newly-established Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) in Mexico City, revealing details about the Tijuana Cartel's drug consignments, stash houses, weapon caches, money transfers, etc., which greatly debilitated that organization. The AFI was delighted to receive such valuable intelligence, resulting in many seizures, which in turn pleased American antinarcotics agencies such as the DEA.

Beset on all sides and with their income slowly being strangled, the Arellano syndicate was facing defeat when its own intimidating enforcer, Ramón Arellano, was killed on February 10, 2002 in Mazatlán; then Benjamín Arellano was arrested in Puebla on March 9, 2002. Within the next couple of years, the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) would report that the *Cártel Arellano Félix* (CAF) had had its sphere-of-influence reduced to only four states, compared with 17 for the rising Sinaloa Cartel and 21 for the Gulf Cartel.

After the latter and their elite Zeta fighters seized control of the Nuevo Laredo border-crossing in May 2002, El Chapo covertly directed his forces to begin infiltrating Nuevo León and supporting the Milenio Cartel of Michoacán in their attempts to wrest back that border-city. [For greater details, see "Milenio Cartel: Challenges, Defeats, and Retreat" and "Valdez Villarreal, Édgar 'La Barbie': Sinaloa Cartel Affiliation" et seq.] After the Milenios were knocked out of this struggle, Guzmán's top lieutenant, Arturo Beltrán, helped Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez prepare to launch a renewed offensive against Nuevo Laredo's Zeta occupiers in September 2004, but first—resentful that the Juárez Cartel had committed so little toward this supposedly joint endeavor and aggrieved because they had executed a couple of El Chapo's traffickers for trespassing in Juárez-claimed territory—he sent a hit squad to assassinate Rodolfo Carrillo in Culiacán on September 11, 2004. A wave of murders and counter-murders ensued, peaking at 250 a month, but with numerous cells now siding with the Sinaloan Federación.

As fighting raged between the Gulf, Juárez, and Sinaloa Cartels, Guzmán suffered a personal loss when his younger brother was murdered in La Palma or Altiplano maximum-security prison at 7:00 p.m. on December 31, 2004 (New Year's Eve), shot seven times by an unknown assailant while walking in a "safe area" set aside for inmates to talk by telephone with their lawyers. A year later, El Chapo's Federación was augmented when Milenio Cartel survivors retreated out of their home state of Michoacán in 2006, to retrench in Jalisco and agree to a protective arrangement subordinating them to his Sinaloa Cartel, under direct operational supervision by his Guadalajara plaza-boss, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel (who promptly tapped into the *milenios*' rich methamphetamine production).

Guzmán himself also had a narrow escape that same summer of 2006, while traveling past Moinora Hill high up in the Triangulo Dorado mountains with his three-dozen bodyguards, only to bump into a patrol of about 30 GAFEs. A firefight erupted, before El Chapo was carried down a steep incline to safety on the back of his security-detail's chief, the Army deserter Lieutenant Manuel Alejandro Aponte Gómez. [For greater details, see "GAFE: A Notorious GAFE Deserter."] General hostilities subsequently eased, until the Sinaloan finally gave up on his attempts to reclaim Nuevo Laredo and had his *sicario* commander, Arturo Beltrán, sign a truce with its Zeta occupiers in May 2007.

Third Marriage (Summer 2007)

On July 2, 2007, El Chapo—still the most wanted man in Mexico—married a Los Angeles-born beauty queen named Emma Coronel Aispuro (daughter of one of his top deputies, Inés Coronel Barreras) in tiny La Angostura in the municipality of Canelas, Durango, in an ostentatious public ceremony on her 18th birthday. Although

already married twice, Guzmán had fallen in love with the "Miss Coffee and Guava" pageant winner, so that before his arrival, a small army of heavily-armed, masked, and black-clad men took over La Angostura on 200 two-seater all-terrain vehicles, sealing off all roads.

A *narcocorrido* band named Los Canelos de Durango appeared aboard a small plane, decked out with gold-handled pistols to provide entertainment, followed by six more planes—from one of which El Chapo emerged, dressed in his traditional jeans, vest, and baseball cap, with an AK-47 strapped across his chest and a pistol that matched his clothing at his belt. Helicopters circled overhead as other planes landed and unloaded innumerable cases of whiskey, crates of heavy weaponry (grenades, machine guns, etc.), and more security guards dressed in green military fatigues, sporting bulletproof vests with police-type radios clipped to their chests.

Dining Out (Early November 2007)

Over the years, numerous instances were recorded of El Chapo materializing in fine restaurants with his bodyguards, calmly enjoying a multicourse meal before paying everyone's bill and slipping away. The best-documented case occurred in early November 2007, when some 30 diners in Las Palmas restaurant on Xicoténcatl Boulevard in Culiacán's Colonia Las Quintas noticed two or three well-dressed young men entering around 8:00 p.m., one of whom addressed them in a firm, loud voice:

> *Gentlemen, please: give me a moment of your time. A man is going to come in, the boss. We ask that you remain in your seats; the doors will close and nobody is allowed to leave. You will also not be allowed to use your* cellulares*. Do not worry; if you do everything that is asked of you, nothing will happen. Continue eating and don't ask for your check. The boss will pay. Thank you.*

Guzmán thereupon entered through the front door along with his retinue, moving easily through the tables shaking hands, politely greeting people with friendly comments such as: "Hello, nice to meet you." "How are you?" "I'm Joaquín Guzmán Loera; a pleasure."

El Chapo then retired into a private room at the back of the restaurant, followed by his entourage and about half of his 15 gunmen, while the remaining *sicarios* sat outside with the diners, watching and speaking in low voices. The drug boss and his party gorged for the next two hours on red steaks piled high with chilies, plus large servings of shrimp and octopus, before Guzmán finally departed, and his security detail vanished moments afterward. As promised, everybody's bill had been paid, with generous tips included for the staff.

War for Ciudad Juárez (Late 2007–2008)

Guzmán and his longtime business-partner Ismael Zambada were already well advanced in their plans for crippling their most powerful rival, the Juárez Cartel under Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo Fuentes. Always a prudent and cunning strategist, El Chapo had begun by having a small army of several thousand *sicarios* quietly raised by his longtime friend Noel "El Flaco" Salgueiro Nevárez (whom Guzmán had mentored as an apprentice smuggler in the Chihuahua mountains in 1995), secretly training these men in distant Veracruz. This paramilitary force dubbed *Gente Nueva* or "New People" consisted of former military personnel, Guatemalan Kaibiles, ex-federal and ministerial policemen, private security guards, etc., whom El Chapo further outfitted with

authentic Army uniforms, armored pickups with the name Gente Nueva or "GN" stenciled on their side panels, high-powered weaponry, balaclavas, and so on.

Advance elements of this force (sometimes called Los Chapos) started to infiltrate Juárez and its suburbs in late 2007 under the command of José Antonio "El Jaguar" Torres Marrufo, gathering intelligence and contacting local criminals disgruntled under Vicente Carrillo's leadership. Fighting broke out on January 5, 2008, plunging this unhappy city into four years of unbridled shootings, abductions, extortions, torture, and cruel executions, aggravated by the loss of 90,000 jobs as the United States entered into a severe recession, shutting down *maquiladora* factories. [For more details, see "Juárez Cartel: War for Ciudad Juárez."]

Break with the Beltráns and Murder of his Son (January–May 2008)

Despite being cousins, it was noteworthy how Arturo Beltrán—defeated at Nuevo Laredo and growing increasingly erratic because of a deepening cocaine addiction—had not been involved in raising El Chapo's new *sicario* army, or its deployment into Ciudad Juárez. It was even rumored that representatives of the disgruntled Beltrán brothers had secretly met in Veracruz with some Zeta bosses in December 2007, to tentatively discuss forming a joint supercartel—and that when Guzmán learned of this treacherous proposal, he allegedly commented that he would have to "cut off" his organization's Beltrán Leyva arm.

Then two weeks after the battle for Juárez had exploded, the youngest brother, Alfredo "El Mochomo" Beltrán, was unexpectedly arrested in Culiacán, and when Arturo Beltrán met that same night of January 21, 2008, with his Federación superiors El Chapo and Zambada to request their approval for breaking his sibling out of jail, they demurred because "conditions were not right." Arturo Beltrán emerged from that meeting resentful and suspicious, yet obedient—until Guzmán's son Iván Archibaldo "El Chapito" was released early from the Altiplano Penitentiary that same April 2008. The paranoid Arturo Beltrán became convinced that El Chapo had sold out his younger brother Alfredo in exchange for his own son's parole, so that relations between the Sinaloa Cartel and its Beltrán Leyva *sicarios* began to deteriorate, worsening when one of the incarcerated Alfredo Beltrán's sons was almost murdered in his Culiacán home on April 30, 2008.

Now fully aroused, Arturo Beltrán ordered his *sicarios* to begin attacking Sinaloa Cartel police collaborators next day, plus posting threatening *narcomantas* accusing the authorities of favoring Guzmán. Amid these rapidly-escalating hostilities, he even dispatched 15 gunmen to vengefully ambush El Chapo's 22-year-old son by his second wife, Édgar Guzmán López, in the City Club Supermarket parking-lot in northern Culiacán's Desarrollo Tres suburb at 8:30 p.m. on May 8, 2008. Firing more than 500 rounds from AK-47s and grenade launchers to disperse this young man's bodyguards, they then perforated his armored white Ford Lobo, killing him along with two companions. Legend has it that when Mothers' Day dawned only two days later, not a single rose could be found in the city, as a heartbroken Chapo had bought at least 50,000 for his son's funeral.

Anticipating further trouble, Mexico's secretary of the interior—Juan Camilo Mouriño—hastily deployed 3,000 troops and federal policemen in a military

operation designated Operación "Sinaloa" on May 13, 2008, the first 300 soldiers arriving in Navolato in a 50-vehicle military convoy that same day. Nine days afterward, 24th Motorized Cavalry Regiment and 94th Infantry Battalion troops—acting on a citizen's complaint—raided a house in Culiacán's Colonia Guadalupe, seizing $6 million and more than 13,800 rounds of ammunition, but Guzmán's allies were nonetheless obliged to abandon their operations in Sinaloa's capital and retreat. Gradually, though—despite being simultaneously embroiled in a major effort to conquer Ciudad Juárez—El Chapo's powerful and well-organized cartel gained the upper hand, while Arturo Beltrán grew more unfocused and volatile until he was killed by naval special-forces at his luxurious Cuernavaca retreat on December 16, 2009.

With the fierce Arturo Beltrán removed, their organization soon began to disintegrate in 2010, freeing Guzmán to finish battering the exhausted Juárez Cartel into submission two years later, at a horrendous cost in civilian casualties.

Recapture (February 2014)

Guzmán was surprised to hear a SWAT team pounding on an adjacent door in a luxury gated-condominium at Los Cabos, Baja California, around 3:00 p.m. on February 22, 2012, but jumped out of his unit's rear balcony and ran off, leaving everything behind. Finally, though, a top-secret operation codenamed *Gárgola* or "Gargle" commenced on January 19, 2014, when 200 crack naval commandos flew in from their base near Los Cabos and deplaned in a distant hangar at Culiacán's airport.

Their intent (based on U.S. intelligence) was to take El Chapo at his vast new ranch-compound being built in the community of Sánchez Celis, tucked away in a lonely rural corner of Culiacán's municipality, but this huge project was not quite finished. Then the capture on February 13, 2014, of Jesús Enrique "El Loco" Sandoval Romero—a lieutenant of his longtime friend and cartel-partner Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada—plus four bodyguards and an arsenal of 77 assault-rifles, 15 pistols, and four vehicles, revealed that the 56-year-old fugitive had begun venturing into Culiacán and Mazatlán to see his twin baby daughters, plus visit family and friends such as his grown sons Alfredo and Iván. [A number of cell-phones being carried by El Loco provided additional leads for positional triangulation.]

Another report added that Guzmán had just attended a family reunion in Sinaloa, along with "El Mayo" Zambada. Now certain that he had descended from the mountains, a raid was attempted on the house of El Chapo's ex-wife Griselda Pérez López at 642 Cerro de las Siete Gotas Street in Culiacán's Colonia Antonio Rosales, almost catching the elusive drug-lord—although its steel-reinforced front door checked the assault-team's initial rush long enough for Guzmán and his bodyguard [an ex-GANFE named Carlos Manuel "El Cóndor" Hoo Ramírez] to escape through a complex system of secret tunnels connecting to seven different houses nearby, so that he could emerge from any one and be picked up by a waiting car.

The authorities nonetheless continued making descents on several more Sinaloa Cartel properties, knowing that Guzmán was still moving about the city. A *marino* strike-force approached another suspected safe house on Enrique Colunga Street in Culiacán's Colonia Libertad at 6:30 a.m. on February 17, 2014, from which an armed figure emerged to wave a car out of its garage, then spotted the naval personnel and ran back inside. Charging after him,

they also detained the exiting vehicle, which was being driven by one of El Chapo's young bodyguards, who confessed that he was taking his boss' personal weaponry to him at a third safe-house nearby on Constituyente Emiliano García Street, opposite the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa's Unidad Académica Augusto César Sandino preparatory school. When that residence was raided as well, no one was found inside, as both safe houses had been equipped with cleverly-concealed hatches with hydraulic lifts beneath their bathtubs, providing a rapid means of egress. Such close calls nonetheless cut down on the fugitive's options, as dozens of his criminal collaborators were being swept up, plus at least six of his custom-built safe houses had been seized, along with dozens of vehicles and hundreds of weapons.

Finally at 3:45 a.m. on Saturday, February 22, 2014, ten pickups bearing 65 Navy special-forces—guided by intelligence supplied by the DEA and U.S. Marshals Service, indicating that the fugitive had been hiding inside Apartment 401 of the beachfront "Suites Miramar" condominiums at 608 Avenida del Mar in Mazatlán for the past two days—quietly approached this 13-story building and subdued Hoo, the lone bodyguard in its lobby. Some 30 *marinos* then silently made their way up to the fourth floor by both elevators and stairs, assembling outside Guzmán's door before storming inside. El Chapo was lying in one of two bedrooms with his young wife, Emma, while their daughters, Emali and Maria Joaquina ("Kiki"), slept in the other. The diminutive drug-lord did not reach for his gold-plated AK-47, but instead bolted into the bathroom and resisted only briefly upon reemerging, although the *marinos* easily overpowered him, leaving a few cuts and bruises on his face.

Guzmán was placed under arrest at 6:40 a.m., allowed to get dressed, then taken to the ground floor and walked to the condo's parking-lot, where the first photos confirming his capture were taken. His identity verified through a quick fingerprint check, he was subsequently flown to Mexico City for formal processing and presented before a press conference at Mexico City's International Airport early that same afternoon. Immediately thereafter, El Chapo was flown out at 2:55 p.m. aboard a Federal Police Black Hawk helicopter, escorted by two Navy and one Air Force helicopters, to be deposited at the maximum-security Federal Social Re-adaptation Center No. 1 in Almoloya de Juárez, State of Mexico.

Once again housed in El Altiplano, Guzmán was confined in Área Número 20, *Pasillo* or "Hallway" 11, a highly restricted sector where cells do not have windows and inmates are not allowed to interact, nor are they permitted contact with family members. It was reported that he was shuffled seven times between different cells on his first five nights, so as to confuse any spies. Neighbors included José Jorge "J. J." Balderas, a former Beltrán Leyva lieutenant, and the Zeta Jaime "El Hummer" González; in another nearby unit was one of El Chapo's brothers, Miguel Ángel Guzmán Loera. The drug kingpin was kept alone in his cell, with only a bed, shower, and toilet. Two days later, the government formally charged El Chapo with drug trafficking, to which an organized-crime charge would be added on February 25, 2014, while federal authorities continued gathering evidence for further prosecutions.

Tunnel-Escape from El Altiplano (July 2015)

Closed-circuit camera footage showed Guzmán lying on his bunk on the Saturday

evening of July 11, 2015, watching a loudly blaring program on a portable television. At 8:46 p.m., the sound of drilling can be heard above its noise, and then the sound of "blows of metal on concrete," before the drug lord walked over into his adjoining shower-stall at 8:52 p.m. and suddenly crouched down out of sight behind its low partition wall. No one in the prison control-room checked to verify his on-screen presence again until 9:17 p.m., when guards were dispatched to investigate.

The Sinaloa Cartel chief had meanwhile dropped down through a perfectly-aligned hole measuring 1.5 x 1.5 feet cut into the shower's concrete floor, and climbed down a 32-foot ladder to meet a mile-long tunnel driven through the rocky subsoil, complete with overhead lighting and ventilation system. He had even ridden on a custom-built motorcycle sled, with two carts rigged up on an underground rail system, speeding down the 5.5-foot-high tunnel to freedom. It took yet another three hours to activate a "code red" lockdown of the prison and alert outside authorities. As of September 2015, 34 officials had been arrested on suspicion of aiding the escape, among them two ex-directors of Altiplano and the former head of Mexico's federal prisons.

Second Recapture (January 2016)

Six months after having escaped from El Altiplano, the elusive "Chapo" Guzmán secretly arrived on January 6, 2016, aboard a small private plane at an airstrip near Los Mochis, Sinaloa [population: 250,000], to be escorted to one of several fortified safe-houses that the cartel maintained in that city. Next morning, an intelligence report was processed through the civilian Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional or "Center for Research and National Security" (CISEN) headquarters in Mexico City, which quickly passed its information along to the Navy's Unidad de Operaciones Especiales or "Special Operations Unit" (UNOPES). The 17-man "Puma" special-forces unit already being in Los Mochis, it was ordered to prepare to assault this safe house before sunrise next morning, while three more contingents of 50 additional *marinos* were quickly airlifted in as reinforcements, for an operation that was to be designated *Cisne Negro* or "Black Swan."

The latter units deplaned at Guaymas (rather than risk being detected by flying straight into Los Mochis) and were driven for five hours through the night to join the advance team. Just after midnight on January 7–8, 2016, *marino* lookouts spotted a white vehicle driven by one of Guzmán's known associates picking up a big take-out order from a *taquería* two blocks from the suspected cartel safe-house at Boulevard Jiquilpan 1002 in the Fraccionamiento "Las Palmas" district—indicating the presence of a large group inside. The first *marinos* therefore breached its reinforced doors at 4:40 a.m. on January 8, 2016, fighting their way inside despite heavy counter-fire from .50-caliber rounds and 40mm grenade launchers. After 15 minutes of exchanges and pursuits across adjoining rooftops, Guzmán's five surviving *sicarios* surrendered, one other having been killed.

Yet the elusive drug-lord was nowhere to be found. It was only an hour-and-a-half later, when the strike force resorted to using crowbars to tear down a false mirrored wall, that they discovered a concrete-lined escape tunnel leading underground into the city's storm drains. El Chapo and regional lieutenant Orso Iván "El Cholo" Gastélum Cruz had crawled away into the darkness on their hands and knees, hiding in the maze of three-foot-high drains; but as daylight dawned, it began to rain aboveground and

Los Mochis' storm drains soon started filling with water. A begrimed Guzmán and his companion consequently emerged around 7:00 a.m. near a gas station at the intersection of Boulevard Jiquilpan and Antonio Rosales (a mile from the raided safe-house).

Carjacking a passing white Volkswagen, the desperate pair attempted to drive off, only to have this vehicle sputter and die a few blocks away. They then commandeered a red Ford Focus stopped at a traffic light on Adolfo López Mateos Avenue, driven by a woman accompanied by her daughter and five-year-old grandson [El Chapo politely handing over her purse before speeding off]. Heading south out onto Highway 15 toward Guasave and Navojoa, the fugitives were intercepted shortly thereafter by a police cruiser and detained without resistance, being held in the elegant roadside Hotel Doux. It is said that when the Puma special-forces commander finally placed Guzmán under arrest, he commented to his bedraggled captive: "Your six-month vacation is over."

[Two weeks later, Guzmán's first and third wives, as well as his daughter Alejandrina Giselle, would file joint petitions to register an international copyright granting them exclusive commercial rights over his "El Chapo" nickname in two-dozen different spellings, which was accepted and registered in the Global Brand Database of the World Organization of Intellectual Property.]

Attacks on his Family (June–August 2016)

Guzmán was abruptly transferred from the Altiplano Penitentiary during the early hours of Saturday, May 7, 2016, to the Centro Federal de Readaptación Social (Cefereso) Número 9 Norte in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, briefly arousing fears that he might be orchestrating yet another escape—although only more legal wrangling and appeals ensued. Then some 50 heavily-armed men dressed in black and wearing balaclavas abruptly intruded at his mountaintop *ranchería* known as La Tuna in the municipality of Badiraguato—El Chapo's longtime retreat and home to his mother, Consuelo Loera—on the morning of Saturday, June 11, 2016, proclaiming themselves *sicarios* sent by his 24-year-old embittered great-nephew, Alfredo "El Mochomito" Beltrán Guzmán.

Some of these interlopers burst inside his mother's home and finding her alone with a maid, threatened Consuelo Loera's servant at gunpoint to surrender her phone before severing the internet connection and stealing keys to the compound, allowing them to commandeer four *cuatrimotos* or "four-wheel all-terrain vehicles" and depart within a few minutes to shoot up and burn several nearby dwellings. During their absence, Chapo's mother and her maid escaped to a hidden airstrip and were flown out aboard a light plane to safety. The attackers roamed from La Tuna to nearby La Palma and Arroyo Seco unchallenged over the next seven days, terrifying inhabitants by angrily demanding the whereabouts of El Chapo's brother Aureliano "El Guano" Guzmán Loera (apparently bent upon exacting vengeance for his role in the April 11, 2015, slaying at Bacacoragua of Ernesto Guzmán Hidalgo, El Chapo's 70-year-old half-brother and El Mochomito's maternal grandfather). At least three men were murdered at La Tuna during this hunt, plus two more at Arroyo Seco, before word at last reached the Army base at distant Culiacán and a column of soldiers arrived to relieve La Tuna on June 18, 2016.

When informed of his family-home's violation while awaiting extradition at Ciudad

Juárez, El Chapo was alarmed but thankful that his mother had not been harmed. But with the Beltráns still facing defeat against the Sinaloa Cartel for control over Nayarit's drug-traffic, El Mochomito struck again at 1:00 a.m. on Monday, August 15, 2016, by having El Chapo's 33-year-old son, Iván Archivaldo, and 29-year-old son, Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar, kidnapped at gunpoint while celebrating the former's birthday with four friends in the upscale La Leche restaurant-bar in the resort city of Puerto Vallarta. Authorities feared violence might erupt between the Sinaloa and CJNG Cartels, but longtime Guzmán business associate Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada contacted the kidnappers and was able to secure the young men's release at an unknown cost after a week's negotiations. This daring abduction was nevertheless seen as the second humiliation inflicted on the once all-powerful Sinaloans, in addition to adding to El Chapo's personal distress.

[Analysts would later speculate that these attacks had been secretly encouraged by Sinaloa Cartel lieutenant Dámaso López Núñez, who was taking over various drug operations and smuggling routes, until his arrest in Mexico City's upscale Colonia Anzures on May 2, 2017. The cartel remained firmly under the command of Ismael Zambada, with Guzman's sons *Los Chapitos* or "Little Chapos" reportedly in charge of "street-level drug dealing, especially in Culiacán, and the defense operations, the weaponry."]

Extradition and Conviction (2017–Present)

After nearly a year of appeals and legal proceedings, Guzmán's long-deferred extradition was suddenly cleared and the prison locked down for two hours, for El Chapo to be flown out of Ciudad Juárez late on the afternoon of January 19, 2017, landing that same night at Long Island MacArthur Airport in Islip, New York. He would be indicted in the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn on ten charges associated with the manufacture and distribution of a wide range of drugs, use of firearms, money laundering, and running an ongoing criminal enterprise, his trial not commencing until November 2018. He was found guilty by a jury on February 12, 2019, and sentenced five months later to life in prison plus 30 years as well as to pay $12.6 billion in forfeiture, a veteran DEA agent nonetheless commenting that while "a great moral victory for the rule of law, it did very little to have a negative impact on the Sinaloa Cartel."

See also: Altiplano Prison; Infantería de Marina; Tunnels.

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H–I

It was as if it all fell out of the sky to earth. We all knew what was happening, but it was as if it happened in silence.

—anonymous eyewitness, reflecting on the Zetas' brutal but uncontested seizure of power in Coahuila (November 2012)

Heroin. Addictive and potentially deadly opioid derived from refined morphine, a natural substance extracted from the red or purple poppy-flowers (*papaver somniferum*) known in Mexico as *amapolas*.

Historical Background

In 1971, an estimated 20 percent of American enlisted personnel in Vietnam were addicted to heroin; two years later, 20 percent of all 21-year-olds in Washington, DC, had sought treatment for heroin addiction. The U.S. government responded by closing off the Turkish connection that had been supplying its domestic market, only to see an ever-increasing flow of low-grade heroin begin reaching American cities from Mexico, which by 1975 was providing 89 percent of this supply—already a $2 billion-a-year trade.

A joint U.S.-Mexican eradication operation codenamed "Condor" was launched that same November 1975, deploying helicopters and light aircraft outfitted with tanks and undercarriage sprayers to mist defoliants over clandestine opium and marijuana fields dotting northern Mexico. Initial results proved promising, heroin and marijuana shipments into the United States dropping by half, causing street prices to shoot up exponentially, so that this program was dubbed the "Mexican Miracle" by the press. The quantity of exported heroin had been reduced by one and a half tons in a single year, and its retail purity was at its lowest level in seven years, so that overdoses were dramatically reduced. [For more details on this campaign, see "'Condor,' Operation."]

However, Washington's interest in this eradication effort quickly waned, instead becoming more preoccupied as of late 1978 with the tons of potent cocaine arriving in Florida from Colombia, representing a much broader public-health threat. Pressure consequently eased on Mexico's growers and traffickers, so that their production resurged.

Mexican Poppy Cultivation

The impoverished peasant families who plant, tend, and harvest small hidden *plantíos* or "plantings" of poppies high up in the mountains of the so-called *Triángulo Dorado* or "Golden Triangle" of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua are commonly referred to as *gomeros*, although they prefer to call themselves *amapoleros*. The Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán was himself the son of a poor *gomero*, who taught his son how to plant his first crop at the age of 15.

Typically, there are three harvests a year, when the grower—equipped with a

razor-sharp thumb scorer and metal scraping pan—carefully scratches the unripe, button-like *capullos* or "seed pods" so as to release their milky resin, collecting and drying some 300 grams of sticky *goma* or "paste" in a single day, worth about 4,000 pesos. According to one calculation, a kilo of seed is required to sow a hectare of poppy plants and usually yields 11 kilos of *goma*, which can be sold for nearly 13,000 pesos per kilo to buyers from distant cartels stationed in nearby villages [most identifiable by the short-wave radios that they carry in areas far removed from telephone lines or cellular towers]. Growers normally won't say which group buys their opium paste, although the Sinaloa Cartel has long dominated the Triángulo Dorado. The relatively low-quality marijuana grown at lower elevations commands only about 250 pesos per dried, pressed kilogram, its price having fallen away—possibly because of the legalization and availability of higher-quality homegrown marijuana in the United States.

The buyers accumulate opium-paste yields, to be conveyed down out of the mountains into nearby cities and refined in clandestine labs into a kilo of heroin worth 700,000 pesos. Individual doses distributed to dealers for sale in the United States will be worth almost 2 million pesos a kilo and, of course, command much higher retail prices on the streets.

Brown Heroin (1946–early 1990s)

Because of a lack of trained chemists and proper equipment in their unsophisticated hidden labs (often extemporized and moved around frequently in urban slums), Mexican and Colombian heroin refiners had for decades limited themselves to producing low-grade "brown" heroin—attained during its very first purification stage, and therefore faster and cheaper to manufacture than more advanced, multistage grades of "white" heroin. Brown heroin has many nicknames in Mexico such as *azúcar morena* or "brown sugar," *polvo pardo* or "brown powder," etc. It is usually smoked rather than injected, but lacks the euphoric "rush" desired by repeat users, so was viewed as an inferior alternative to Afghan or Asian white heroin.

Black-Tar Heroin (mid-1990s–2009)

In order to become more competitive, Mexican refiners upgraded their methods as of the late 1990s to produce a higher-quality "black-tar" heroin, which nonetheless remained a crude product manufactured by halting its processing immediately after the acetylation phase, thus forgoing the expensive additional steps to transform it into a costly white powder. Purity levels of black-tar heroin do not exceed 25–30 percent, but this was at least potent enough to provide a "rush" upon being injected by addicts. However, aside from the obvious health dangers associated with such practices—oxygen deprivation, heart infections, overdose, etc.—the 70–75 percent of sticky, unrefined "black-tar" residue further retains toxic contaminants that can cause other complications such as wound botulism, venous sclerosis, abscesses, lethal bacterial outbreaks, etc.

This is one of the most dangerous and addictive forms of this narcotic, and the Beltrán-Leyva Organization once controlled much of the black-tar heroin trade, until their leadership was decimated beginning as of December 2009 and the syndicate fell apart next year. Better-quality "white heroin" imported into the United States from Afghanistan nevertheless remained the top choice among American users, limiting sales of Mexican products.

White Heroin (2010–Present)

Bowing to demand, analysts in 2011 noted how that previous year, Mexican syndicates had at last started bringing:

> *. . . in experts, chemists, folks from Asia who taught them how to produce better heroin. You saw purity levels climb from 40 percent to 50 percent, up to 90 percent.*

Refiners quickly shifted over to making the coveted high-grade white exclusively, and as a result Mexico's poppy-production nearly tripled by 2012, displacing Myanmar as the world's second-largest grower, with an estimated 10,500 hectares under cultivation—representing a potential output of 26 metric tons. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 50 percent of all heroin being sold in the U.S. market by then was of Mexican origin, 43–45 percent Colombian, and the rest Asian, although almost all of it was being smuggled into North America by Mexican cartels.

In February 2014, the DEA reported that heroin seizures at the Mexican border had increased nearly fourfold, from 1,232 pounds in 2008 to 4,610 pounds by 2012, "which correspond with increasing levels of production of Mexican heroin and the expansion of Mexican heroin-traffickers into the Eastern and Midwestern U.S. markets." And while incarcerated in Altiplano Prison, "El Chapo" Guzmán even found his regular supply from the Golden Triangle being challenged by competitors such as the Rojos and Guerreros Unidos. The former chief of operations for the DEA, David Gaddis, has pointed out that:

> *There is no cartel that specifically commands and controls the heroin market. Rather* [it is] *family-connected and locally-based organizations who finance opium cultivation, run manufacturing laboratories, and transport it to markets in quantities of several kilos—not several tons, as is the case with cocaine.*

By 2016, the DEA would complain that Mexico's poppy cultivation had spread to encompass 32,000 hectares, sufficient to produce 81 metric tons of heroin—a threefold increase in only three years—but which still left Mexico as only the third-largest opium producer in the world, behind Afghanistan and Myanmar.

See also: Cocaine; "Condor," Operation; Methamphetamines.

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Horizontes del Sur Slaughter—see "Juárez Cartel: Suffering"

Huachicolero—see "Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–Present): Fuel Thefts"

Humaya Cemetery—see "Jardines del Humaya Cemetery"

Iguala Mass Abduction (September 2014). Punitive detention of student protesters by municipal policemen, ending in a wholesale massacre perpetrated by its local Guerreros Unidos drug-gang.

Police Intervention (September 26, 2014)

On the evening of September 26, 2014, about 100 students from the Escuela Normal Rural "Raúl Isidro Burgos" or "Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Normal School"—a teachers' college located about 90 miles away at Ayotzinapa, long known for activism—headed out aboard three commandeered buses for their annual tradition of "borrowing" more city buses from Iguala, and then using these to travel to a political event and return them once it concluded. This particular year, the students' intention was drive to Mexico City several days later, to participate in a protest march commemorating the Tlaltelolco student massacre in 1968. Local bus companies and authorities usually tolerated such nuisance tactics, but in 2014 the region's security forces instead stepped up their patrols and used their command center to monitor the students' movements.

Having commandeered five buses by 9:15 p.m., the protesters began heading north out of Iguala back toward Ayotzinapa in two groups, only to be pursued by several police cars. A confrontation occurred at a roadblock, students pelting the police with rocks and causing some damage, so that the buses were fired upon when they resumed their progression. A student was hit in the head and three others injured, so that they called an emergency dispatch-number at 9:48 p.m., and an ambulance rescued the wounded. Meanwhile, with violent pandemonium spreading throughout Iguala's darkened streets, municipal policemen forced groups of students out of two buses and—with a military intelligence-officer looking on, plus state and federal policemen—took 43 away in relays of patrol cars.

By midnight, local journalists as well as some Ayotzinapa teachers began to show up, until a half-hour later a white SUV and black car drove by the crowd, its occupants (wearing bulletproof vests and hoods) taking photos of the gathering. These menacing strangers then returned at 12:45 a.m. and three jumped out, opening fire at close range and killing two young men, while wounding several others as the crowd scattered into the rainy night.

Aftermath (September 2014–Present)

The 43 captured students would remain missing, it later being reported that their police captors had handed them over to the local Guerreros Unidos or "United Warriors" gang for execution, alleging that their prisoners were actually rival drug-traffickers who had come into Iguala to challenge the local cartel. The Guerreros Unidos killed the young students without compunction and dumped their bodies beside Loma de Coyote or "Coyote Hill" in an out-of-the-way garbage dump known as Puente de Río

San Juan, about a 15-minute drive from Iguala in the rural municipality of Cocula. Despite the subsequent arrest of more than 125 individuals for complicity in this crime—including numerous policemen and Guerreros Unidos gang members—the case still remains unresolved.

See also: Body Disposals.

Further Reading

"Ayotzinapa: A Timeline of the Mass Disappearance That Has Shaken Mexico," *Vice News* (September 25, 2015); Miroff, Nick, "Mass Kidnapping of Students in Iguala, Mexico, Brings Outrage and Protests," *Washington Post* (October 11, 2014); Pérez Salazar, Juan Carlos, "Mexico Missing Students: Looking for Iguala Mass Graves," *BBC Mundo* (December 8, 2014).

Infantería de Marina

(2007–Present). "Naval infantry," the traditional Spanish designation for ship-borne soldiers, but which has been supplanted in recent years by a Mexican term borrowed from the United States: *marinos*.

Undistinguished Historical Background (1821–1980)

Historically, the correct term for "navy" is *marina*, so that modern Mexico's "Secretariat of the Navy" is officially known as the Secretaría de Marina-Armada de México. Despite having existed as the *Secretaria del Almirantazgo* or "Secretariat of the Admiralty" when the country first gained its independence from Spain in late September 1821, followed soon after by the creation of a penniless *Ministerio de Guerra y Marina* or "Ministry of War and Navy" as of October 4, 1821, the Mexican Navy at that time consisted of only three tiny ships and a few coastal militia companies. A short-lived half-regiment of four battalions was raised within the next couple of years, two of which were supposed to perform coastal patrols, while flags and insignia were approved as of October 16, 1823, for a *Cuerpo de Artillería de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval Infantry Artillery Corps."

However, for a nation that had been colonized by generations of Spanish settlers hastening up through its torrid, pestilential coastlands into the cool mountainous interior, and which had emerged from its struggle for freedom agriculturally self-sufficient, yet lacking in any significant overseas commerce, no maritime tradition had ever taken root. As a result, the Navy would remain the republic's junior armed service for the next century and a half, with only a few ships and a few hundred *infantes de mar* ever employed—numbers dwarfed by the tens of thousands of soldiers comprising the regular Army. Even the fledgling Fuerza Aérea Mexicana or "Mexican Air Force" (FAM), which did not come into existence until the 20th century, would fare much better in allocation of funds toward aircraft purchases and construction of aerodromes than its naval counterpart.

Struggle for Relevancy (1980s-2004)

In 1983, the Navy was authorized to create its 24o. Batallón de Infantería de Marina de Guardias Presidenciales or "24th Presidential Guard Naval-Infantry Battalion," so that a marine presence might be featured among the prestigious brigade of elite units providing ceremonial sentries and residing on the grounds of Los Pinos Presidential Palace in Mexico City. A single Batallón de Infantería de Marina de Fusileros Paracaidistas or "Parachutist-Fusiliers Naval Infantry Battalion" (BIMFUSPAR) was also approved in 1992, yet the actual order to activate the Navy's first commando unit

was not given until after the Zapatista insurrection erupted in Chiapas in January 1994. Such a battalion was sworn into service by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari as of June 1, 1994, although its elements—three rifle companies, one heavy-weapons support company, and a logistics company—were only ever intended as a "strategic reserve" in Mexico City under the direct supervision of the *Secretaría de Marina* or "Secretariat of the Navy's" (SEMAR) Alto Mando or "High Command," so would never see active duty before eventually being merged into the Seventh Batallón de Marina or BIM-7 in 2010.

As part of the overall expansion of Mexico's armed forces, the naval infantry was authorized to add three more battalions totaling 35 new companies to its strength as of 1996, headquartered in Mexico City, Acapulco, and Veracruz. However, the Army had also been allowed to greatly expand its own special-forces as part of this same modernization effort, creating more than 70 new Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Airmobile Groups" (GAFEs)—after which the Army High Command further announced during the summer of 1999 that it would be adding 36 Grupos Anfibios de Fuerzas Especiales del Ejército or "Army Amphibious Special-Forces Groups" (GANFEs) to its existing strength. Such a proposal to train and outfit soldiers to conduct waterborne patrols along rivers, lakes, and coastlines represented a jurisdictional encroachment resented by the Navy.

The Army's amphibious program nonetheless went ahead after $13 million was received from the American government that same year of 1999, toward the purchase of 140 light boats and other specialized equipment; but it soon became apparent that a cursory six-week instructional course could not hope to prepare soldiers for handling small boats under shifting weather and currents out on the open sea, or for the difficulties of navigating after nightfall or beyond sight of land. The navy, meanwhile, established its own much more demanding *Centro de Capacitación y Adiestramiento Especializado de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval-Infantry Basic and Advanced Training Center" that same year, at a remote base on a 210-hectare, restored colonial-era estate known as the ex-Hacienda San Luis Carpizo, five miles outside Champotón and nine from El Carmen along Highway 286 in southeastern Campeche. There, intensive introductory courses into amphibious warfare, scuba diving, marksmanship, parachuting, rappelling, disarming explosives, etc., were given to recruits over a span of 53 weeks, and it was said that only 15 percent of inductees graduated and moved on to more advanced training.

Such exhaustive preparation allowed the Navy to develop its own *Fuerzas Especiales* or "Special Forces" (FES) companies as of 2001, most members volunteering and being selected from among its existing "Parachutist-Fusiliers Battalion," who had already received some instruction from a few officers who had undergone commando-training abroad. Eventually, graduates from Infantería de Marina training-courses would be assigned to one of two 230-man special-forces companies: one known as *Fuerzas Especiales del Golfo* or "Gulf Special Forces" (FESGO) stationed on the Gulf Coast, while *Fuerzas Especiales del Pacífico* (FESPA) operated along the Pacific coast.

In the meantime, the Navy launched into a bureaucratic struggle to have the Army's amphibious resources reallocated to its own service, which the Army High Command stubbornly refused for seven years, offering

a handful of successful riverbank operations as proof that its waterborne troops were becoming more proficient—despite ample evidence to the contrary. Although each of the Army's 36 GANFE groups was supposed to have a nominal strength of 620 *anfibios*, representing a total of 22,300 men, the maximum number trained and retained in service was a paltry 3,500. The naval infantry, by way of contrast, was to be further enlarged according to the inter-service *Acuerdo Secretarial 156* or "Secretarial Accord Number 156" signed in June 2004, into three active-duty brigades comprising a total of 11 regional battalions (including three "Parachutist Fusiliers Battalions"), not counting its Presidential Guards formation and a few auxiliary units.

Inter-Service Competition (2007–2008)

Finally, the inauguration of President Felipe Calderón on December 1, 2006, and his immediate promulgation of an all-out, aggressive "war against drug traffickers," led to the Infantería de Marina's first major commitment. One week later, Operación Conjunta "Michoacán" or Operativo Conjunto "Michoacán" ("Joint Operation 'Michoacán'") began flooding that state with 4,260 soldiers, plus 1,054 black-bereted "marines" supported by their own seven MI-17 helicopters; two Bolco helicopters; two Aviocard patrol-aircraft outfitted with night-vision cameras; three interceptor planes; a patrol boat; 35 amphibious craft; plus 17 support vehicles. All set up their camps and command post by December 11 at the Apatzingán headquarters of the 43rd Military Zone under General Alonso Garrido.

Determined to resolve the protracted dispute over resources, Army General Guillermo Galván Galván—Secretary of National Defense—and Admiral Mariano Francisco Saynez Mendoza, Secretary of the Navy, were ordered to jointly chair a meeting in Mexico City on February 14, 2007, to determine the best ways of transferring GANFE personnel and equipment over to the Navy. No consensus could be reached, leaving the Army to counterpropose in May of that same year that its 3,500 GANFE personnel be instead redeployed to form the backbone of a new joint-services task force to be called the *Cuerpo Especial de Fuerzas de Apoyo Federal* or "Federal Support-Forces Special Corps" (CEFAF), thereby merging GANFE operations with the Navy's—"not with the intent of directly interfering in its functions, but rather to cover rivers, lakes and coastal waters within [the Army's] jurisdiction by means of coastal patrols, aerial reconnaissance, and interceptions."

This proposal was rejected by both the Navy and Calderón administration, and Mexico's Congress further enacted a special legislative bill entitled "Maritime Secretariat Agreement 88" as of July 8, 2007—in response to urgent appeals from such states as Aguascalientes and Zacatecas, whose governors wished for the presence of reliable *marino* detachments during times of crisis—and which granted the Navy wide-ranging police powers "to operate throughout the country, even in landlocked areas." Because of this legislative remedy, the Army had no other choice than to reduce the number of its own vastly under-strength GANFE groups from nine to five as of July 16, 2007, although the Army High Command still refused to disband its remaining *anfibio* units or surrender any equipment.

An inquiry conducted by the Chamber of Deputies' *Comisión de Marina* or "Navy Commission" confirmed the unresolved shortcomings of Army GANFE units,

although—ironically—it would be the frequent security lapses blighting raids conducted by its GAFE special-forces that would see the Infantería de Marina vastly augmented and its role enhanced beyond the traditional duties of patrolling the ten-kilometer limit, and providing security on offshore oil rigs and in major seaports. Congress finally passed a bill in August 2007 which directed that all GANFE personnel, installations, and $13 million worth of equipment—including 143 large boats, 110 smaller craft, six Zodiac speedboats, and eight military-grade Jet Skis—be transferred into Navy inventories. Three years later, an American observer would comment:

> *Somewhat uniquely, Mexico's armed forces are divided into two separate Cabinet-level entities, with a Naval Secretariat overseeing the Navy, and a National Defense Secretariat in charge of the Army and Air Force. The two secretariats rarely coordinate except on orders from the Presidency, and sometimes regard each other as foes; there have even been instances of shootouts.*

Escalation (2008–2009)

Now cleared to participate in land-based operations against organized crime, as well as having received an infusion of additional weaponry and materiel, the Naval Infantry Corps—one of three branches encapsulating Mexico's modern Navy, the other two being "Surface Fleet" and "Naval Aviation"—was able to expand exponentially during 2008–2009 into a force of 18,000 men divided into 30 *Batallones de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval Infantry Battalions" [each officially designated as a "BIM," and individually enumerated as BIM-1, BIM-2, etc.]. Their personnel tables were as follows:

- Each BIM battalion was to have a complement of 628 marines, commanded by a *capitán de navío* or "senior naval captain."
- Three of each BIM battalion's five companies were to comprise veteran *fusileros marinos* or "marine fusiliers," while heavier firepower was to be provided by a fourth *compañía de apoyo* or "support company" armed with mortars, rocket launchers, and heavy machine-guns, plus a fifth "service company" to handle logistics.
- Each individual company was subdivided into three *secciones*, with each section being composed of three *pelotones* or "platoons" of 13 men apiece, commanded by a *tercer* or *segundo maestre* or "third or second master."
- Each 13-man *escuadrón* was led by a *cabo jefe de escuadrón* or "squadron-chief corporal" and included at least one veteran *fusilero granadero* or "grenadier fusilier" armed with an M16A2 assault rifle and 40mm M203 grenade launcher, plus a *fusilero ametrallador* or "machine gun fusilier" carrying a 5.65mm Colt RO 750 Light Support Weapon, while the remaining 11 men were issued standard assault rifles such as M16A2s.

These 30 battalions would in turn be formed into eight *Brigadas de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval Infantry Brigades" (BRIGIM), each a rear admiral's command:

- three being positioned along the Gulf Coast—the First, Third, and Fifth Brigades—each encompassing four BIM battalions, and
- four more brigades along the Pacific coast: the Second Brigade consisting of one BIM battalion; the Fourth with five

battalions; plus the Sixth and Eighth with four battalions apiece.

All 30 formations would be deployed nationwide according to the *Oficina Coordinadora General de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval Infantry General Coordinating Office," odd-numbered battalions being assigned to garrison the Gulf Coast:

- BIM-1 being stationed at Matamoros, Tamaulipas
- BIM-3 at the Sixth Naval Zone headquarters at Ciudad Madero, Tamaulipas (with a detachment serving farther south down the coast at Túxpan)
- BIM-5 and BIM-7 at the port-city of Veracruz, Veracruz (with the latter unit being responsible for security at its nearby Laguna Verde nuclear power-plant)
- BIM-9 at the smaller port of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz
- BIM-11 at Lerma, Campeche (with a detachment at Champotón)
- BIM-13 at Frontera, Tabasco
- BIM-15 at Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche
- BIM-17 at Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo (with a detachment on the island of Cozumel)
- BIM-19 at Yukalpetén, Yucatán
- BIM-25 at Chetumal, Quintana Roo.

Evenly-numbered battalions were distributed along the Pacific coast:

- BIM-2 being assigned to Ensenada, Baja California Norte
- BIM-4 to La Paz, Baja California Sur
- BIM-6 at Puerto Peñasco, Sonora
- BIM-8 at Guaymas, Sonora
- BIM-10 to Topolobampo, Sinaloa
- BIM-12 at the port-city of Mazatlán, Sinaloa
- BIM-14 at Manzanillo, Colima
- BIM-16 at San Blas, Nayarit
- BIM-18 at Manzanillo, Colima
- BIM-20 at Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco
- BIM-22 at Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán
- BIM-26 at Acapulco, Guerrero (with a detachment serving farther east along the coast at Huatulco, Oaxaca)
- BIM-28 at Salina Cruz, Oaxaca

A few battalions would operate autonomously on their own specific missions:

- BIM-24 being the honorary unit that performed ceremonial duties as part of the "Presidential Guards Brigade" on the grounds of Los Pinos Palace in Mexico City;
- BIM-27 at Xochimilco in Mexico City's Federal District, as well as BIM-29 and BIM-31, which acted as recruitment and reserve formations, and also provided the basic two-month *Curso de Capacitación de Reclutas de la Armada de México* or "Basic Training Course for Recruits into the Mexican Navy" (CCRAM) to those volunteers who enlisted at the Naval Infantry Corps headquarters in the Coyoacán district of Mexico City; and
- BIM-30 and BIM-32, which supervised and conducted advanced training and instructional courses at Puerto Chiapas, Chiapas.

Raw recruits had to undergo a seven-week introductory course at Puerto Chiapas, Chiapas. Free medical service was also provided for members and their families, as well as leased housing or easy-term loans toward the purchase of a home. In addition

to these 30 principal formations, the Naval Infantry Corps still had its single paratrooper unit, which would become merged into the Seventh Batallón de Marina or BIM-7 as of 2010.

Tactical Units (2008)

This force's distribution among multiple garrisons included specialists permanently assigned to operate and maintain two "Amphibious Reaction Forces" (soon reclassified as "Marine Amphibious Groups," one for the Gulf and another for the Pacific coast, with a total of 3,000 men apiece), plus a detachment of select volunteers and veteran BIM squads to man an elite "Special Forces" company for each brigade-sized Amphibious Group, whose organizational table was to be composed of:

- two *Batallones Anfibios de Infantería de Marina* or "Naval Infantry Amphibious Battalions" (BATANs);
- a *Batallón de Artillería* or "Marine Artillery Battalion" (BATAR);
- a *Batallón de Embarcaciones y Vehículos Anfibios* or "Boats and Amphibious Vehicles Battalion" (BATEVA);
- a *Batallón de Servicios* or "Services Battalion" for logistical support (BATSER); and
- a *Batallón de Comandos* or "Marine Commandos Battalion" (BATCO), which included a 220-man *Fuerzas Especiales* or "Special Forces" company for each group.

The latter commando companies were differentiated as the *Batallón de Comandos del Golfo* or "Gulf Marine Commandos Battalion" (BATCOGO) on the Gulf Coast, and *Batallón de Comandos del Pacífico* or "Pacific Marine Commandos Battalion" (BATCOPA), to which a third company would be added during 2008: *Fuerzas Especiales del Centro* or "Central Special-Forces" (FESCEN) based in Mexico City, whose purpose was to provide the High Command with a reserve of 160 special-forces *marinos* for emergency missions.

For optimal flexibility and coordination, the BIMFUSPAR parachutists and BATCOGO, BATCOPA, and FESCEN special-forces were all to be directed through a single *Unidad de Operaciones Especiales* or "Special Operations Unit" (UNOPES), headquartered on the grounds of the BIM-27 base at Xochimilco in Mexico City, which maintained regular contact with Mexican and foreign intelligence services. This system's ability to mount a synchronized strike was demonstrated during a rare instance of an interdiction at sea on July 16, 2008, when a 33-foot-long *narco* submarine from South America was spotted traveling slowly 120 miles off the southwestern coast of Oaxaca, so that a naval special-forces team was quickly flown out by helicopter and rappelled down onto its heaving deck, arresting the four startled crewmen before they could scuttle their vessel—which was then towed by a naval patrol-boat into Huatulco and relieved of 5.8 tons of cocaine.

***Marino* Armaments (2009)**

The earliest weapons issued to naval special-forces were described in April 2009 as:

- biped M249 "Squad Automatic Weapon" or SAW light machine-guns (an American adaptation of the Belgian FN Minimi);
- M16A2 assault rifles and carbines; M16A2 Commando; plus the lighter and shorter M4 carbines;
- compact, short-barreled Belgian FN (Fabrique Nationale) Herstal P90 submachine guns;

- German Heckler & Koch UMP submachine guns; and
- Heckler & Koch semiautomatic PSG1 sniper rifles (whose initials stand for *Präzisionsschützengewehr* or "Precision Shooter Rifle" in German).

However, as early as July 2009, the specialized journal *Small Arms Review* would enumerate the significant upgrades which had already been made to FES arsenals, including:

- Israeli-designed B-300 82mm antitank rocket-launchers;
- MK19 MOD 3 tripod-mounted 40mm automatic grenade-machine guns;
- South African six-shot Milkor 40mm MGL or "Multishot Grenade Launcher" MK1s; M203PI single-shot 40mm grenade launchers; as well as CIS ["Chartered Industries of Singapore"] 40mm AGL or "Automatic Grenade Launchers";
- Heckler & Koch MSG90 sniper rifles—an improved, lighter, and more portable version of the PSG1 model;
- Mossberg Model 590A1 12-gauge "Mariner" military-grade shotguns;
- Heckler & Koch HK21A1 and FN [Fabrique Nationale] MAG-60-20 7.62mm machine guns, on tripod and pedestal mounts;
- FAL-Para or *Fusil Automatique Léger* or "Light Automatic Rifles";
- Spanish CETME Ameli biped 5.65mm SAW light machine-guns, whose complicated acronym denotes that they were designed at the *Centro de Estudios Técnicos de Materiales Especiales* or "Special Materials Technical Studies Center" to serve as *Ametralladoras ligeras* or "light machine-guns;"
- variants of Heckler & Koch MP5 or "*Maschinenpistole* 5" submachine guns;
- and an array of pistols including the Belgian FN "*F*ive-seve*N*" semiautomatic; Beretta 9-mm Mod 92FS; Browning .45 or Super .38-caliber M1911A1 semiautomatics; and classic Smith & Wesson 41 Magnum Model 657 revolvers.

The Naval Infantry's choice of armaments would continue to broaden as more American funding became available, as well as confiscations of expensive modern firearms from cartel caches.

First Noteworthy Success: Killing Arturo Beltrán (December 2009)

An early test for the *marinos* came when a special-forces unit assigned to the Tercera Zona Naval struck just before dawn on November 3, 2009—at the behest of Veracruz's state PGR office—against a Zeta stash house in the town of Soledad de Doblado near Xalapa, Veracruz. Braulio "El Gonzo" Arellano Domínguez, a regional Zeta boss originally known as Z-20, but later given the designation Z-5, was mortally wounded, after which his three surviving bodyguards surrendered. [Two days later, the Zetas retaliated against Veracruz's regional Seguridad Pública del Estado or "State Public Safety" delegate by tossing his dismembered body out of a car near El Regalito store in Paso del Toro.]

Nonetheless, encouraged by the *marinos*' well-executed strike, the authorities decided to employ Navy special-forces in an even more high-profile operation one month later, going after most-wanted cartel boss Arturo Beltrán Leyva—who was rumored to be hosting a *posada* or "Christmas party" at his mansion in the luxurious gated community of Ahuatepec near Tepoztlán just outside Cuernavaca, Morelos, on December 11, 2009, guarded by his chief of security, Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal with

two dozen *sicarios* sporting gold-and-diamond-studded semiautomatic pistols. The FES strike team surrounded this house and narrowly failed to secure Beltrán, who escaped during an exchange of gunfire that left 3 of his bodyguards dead and 11 captured.

U.S. intelligence continued to track Beltrán's movements and traced him to another luxurious apartment-complex next week in Cuernavaca's Colonia Lomas de la Selva district, where the drug baron was inside an apartment—again preparing to host his Christmas party, the anticipated guest of honor being General Leopoldo Díaz Pérez, commander of the 24th Military Zone. Beltrán was guarded by four *sicarios* inside the apartment, with additional gunmen and lookouts stationed in expanding circles outside the building. [It would subsequently be learned that U.S. government officials had first offered this vital piece of intelligence to the Army, which refused to act, so that it was passed on to the Navy, which promptly sent in its "well trained, well equipped" special forces.]

A 90-minute shootout erupted at 3:00 p.m. on December 16, 2009, after some 200 *marinos*, two Navy Mil Mi-17 helicopters, and two small tanks surrounded the building. Approximately 20 fragmentation grenades were fired back by Beltrán's gunmen in a vain attempt to stem this naval onslaught, before he and four companions were eventually killed (including his top lieutenant, Miguel Ángel "El Buche" Araujo Moreno).

Widespread Approval (December 2009–January 2011)

Op-ed columns in Mexican newspapers commented approvingly about the naval special-forces' participation in Arturo Beltrán's death, expressing such sentiments as:

> *His capacity for corrupting institutions was such, that the detention of this "boss of bosses" this past December had to be entrusted to the Navy, and not to the Army as is customary, for fear that he might receive a* chivatazo *emerging from some military headquarters.*

A "top secret" U.S. Embassy communiqué dated January 29, 2010, further described the mounting disappointment with Army shortcomings, and less than three months later, another confidential U.S. Consulate cable dated March 23, 2010, from Monterrey, mentioned that *marinos* had been "aggressively targeting cartel figures, leading to shootouts during military attempts to arrest high-ranking cartel members, and during chance encounters with cartel motorcades."

A contingent from the Eighth Naval Zone captured Gamaliel "El Güero Huetamo" Aguirre Tavira—the American-born Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez's second in command—in Acapulco on July 11, 2010, then another took the six-foot, six-inch Sergio Enrique "El Grande" or "King Kong" Villarreal Barragán (one of the top surviving Beltrán-Leyva lieutenants) in the luxurious Puerta de Hierro gated community in the city of Puebla on September 12, 2010. Gulf Cartel co-leader Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén was killed, along with three Navy men, during a pitched street-battle fought in Matamoros on November 5, 2010. By early January 2011, it was being openly reported in major American newspapers how:

> *A series of secret diplomatic cables leaked recently revealed the United States' profound unease over Mexico's efforts, despite public assurances to the contrary, with stinging language criticizing the Army as stymied by well-protected fugitive drug lords . . . At the*

same time, however, the naval Marines' small size confines forces to limited commando operations taking out targeted cartel leaders or dismantling small cells, not the massive presence needed to rein in the most widespread violence and retake lost territory such as Juárez, the eastern border state of Tamaulipas, or the Golden Triangle drug-bastion where Durango, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa meet.

American Endorsement (February 2011–August 2012)

U.S. officials found the Navy to be a far more cooperative and amenable ally, describing its 2,000- to 3,000-strong commando forces as "willing, capable, and ready"—while the Army was viewed as slow and "risk averse." Attitudes within the Navy and Army differed sharply: naval officers routinely sought graduate degrees and interacted with civilians, while Army officers remained aloof. An American professor who had lectured at Mexico's naval and military academies noted that Navy officers peppered him with questions, while Army officers remained silent (furthermore adding that naval officers were four times more likely to study abroad than their Army counterparts). The Navy had sent a permanent rotating liaison to the U.S. Northern Command—the Colorado-based unified military command that oversees activities from Alaska to Mexico—as long ago as 2006, years before the Army would follow suit. The Navy also maintains liaison-offices in Key West, Florida, and Norfolk, Virginia. And a young Mexican reporter would more practically note in February 2011:

The first thing you notice about the Marinos *is how tall they are. It's not just a coincidence—there's actually a height requirement for any potential recruit into the Marines, who must be at least 1.80 meters tall (5'11"). They are a bigger and deadlier version of your average Army grunt, and they're stone-cold killers to boot.*

Yet despite its successes, the Navy shied away from publicity—especially from foreign media—often declaring through spokesmen that their officers were too busy for interviews. A professor of national-security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, noted: "The Navy is very sensitive to the fact that they are small and not as politically powerful as the Army."

By the autumn of 2012, naval-infantry units numbered about 15,400 men out of a total Navy strength of 56,000, special-forces units making up a brigade of perhaps 1,800 *marino* commandos. A picked force of 100 men was reputedly drawn on a rotating basis from among the various FES companies, to comprise the elite frontline *Grupo de Alto Impacto* or "High-Impact Group" (GAI) which—shrouded in secrecy—actually carried out the most dangerous operations. The Navy enjoyed one significant advantage in keeping its forces free from organized-crime influences: unlike the Army, naval units have no fixed inland bases, meaning their officers were not as exposed as resident Army garrison-commanders to threats or bribes from crime bosses, one American observer noting:

They go in and out on specific missions. They are not subject to the corruption that comes when you [remain in a fixed locale] *for quite some time.*

The Navy's increasingly close ties with U.S. agencies would be revealed on August 24, 2012, when Federal Police opened fire on an armored American Embassy vehicle on a remote mountain highway. The two

CIA agents and a Mexican naval captain inside were bound for a secret Navy base, the embassy later describing this incident as an "ambush," while 14 of the Federal Police attackers were detained for suspected links to organized crime.

More High-Profile Captures (2012–2015)

Naval special-forces would continue to distinguish themselves in their front-line role against heavily-guarded drug lords, arresting Mario Alberto (M-1) or "El Gordo" Cárdenas Guillén—leader of the Gulf Cartel's Rojos faction—in Altamira, Tamaulipas, on September 3, 2012, followed nine days later by the Gulf Cartel co-leader Jorge Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla Sánchez in the upscale Lomas de Rosales district of Tampico; and the notorious Iván (Z-50) "El Talibán" Velázquez Caballero, leader of a violent Zeta offshoot, in the northern city of San Luis Potosí on September 26, 2012; as well as killing the longtime, most-wanted Zeta founder Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano in the lawless municipality of Progreso, Coahuila, on October 7, 2012. *Marinos* disgorged from a Black Hawk helicopter to scoop up the vicious and paranoid Zeta leader Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño Morales, while driving across an open expanse 13 miles southwest of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, at dawn on June 15, 2013. Thirteen years after the Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán had escaped from prison, they recaptured him in Mazatlán on February 22, 2014; then next month, 53 *marinos* pushed up into the mountains around Tumbiscatío, Michoacán, to hunt down the crackpot Knights Templar leader Nazario "El Más Loco" Moreno González, shooting him at sunrise on March 9, 2014.

When the U.S. State Department approved the sale of an additional 18 Sikorsky UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters to Mexico in mid-April 2014, along with their requisite armaments, spares, and advanced electronics for $680 million, the bulk of this new materiel was destined for the Navy—which continued racking up successes. Naval special-forces spearheaded a joint operation by several federal agencies that apprehended the little-known kingpin Abigael "El Cuini" González Valencia in a restaurant in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, on February 28, 2015. Omar (Z-42) Treviño Morales was taken in the exclusive Colonia Fuentes del Valle neighborhood in San Pedro Garza García, a wealthy suburb of Monterrey, on March 4, 2015. And having escaped from El Altiplano Penitentiary after serving only 17 months, Sinaloa Cartel leader "El Chapo" Guzmán was flushed out of a fortified safe house in Los Mochis by the same "Puma" naval special-forces company that had apprehended him previously, securing him once more on January 8, 2016.

Summary (2017)

During the summer of 2017, the Navy published a report on its special forces' effectiveness during the previous decade of warfare against the cartels, noting that they had participated in at least 900 individual actions during that span (compared with 4,000 by the Army), 282 of which had resulted in gunfire and ended in deaths, their *sicario* opponents suffering 558 killed and 31 wounded during these 282 encounters, compared with only 30 dead and 113 injured among Navy personnel.

See also: Calderón Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesús; GAFE; GANFE; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto.

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If Ciudad Juárez is the "epicenter of pain," as the poet Javier Sicilia calls it, then Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nuevo León are the epicenter of horrors.

—Mexican author Diego Osorno (2012)

Jalisco Nueva Generación, Cártel (2010–Present). Recently-created, powerful, and secretive syndicate that arose out of the Milenio Cartel's ashes.

Emergence (2010)

The Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación materialized after *milenio* survivors—driven out of their home state of Michoacán by Zeta strikes and uncomfortably subordinated for protection to Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's Federación in Jalisco—endured a rancorous split during spring 2010. A faction called "La Resistencia" led by Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos González refused to recognize Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera Cervantes' succession as new Milenio leader, so that clashes began on May 10, 2010, "and a month later the Jalisco New Generation Cartel was announced." [For greater details, see "Cuinis, Los: Rupture."]

The "Jalisco New Generation" name did not become publicly known until three months later, after the Sinaloa Cartel's third-ranking leader and regional boss for Jalisco, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, was killed in a shootout with the Army at one of his luxury Guadalajara homes on July 29, 2010. In the resultant power-vacuum, Nemesio Oseguera visited "El Chapo" Guzmán that same summer and agreed to abide by the *milenios*' previous agreement, whereby this new CJNG would continue to operate as Sinaloan subordinates, seconded by his brother-in-law Abigael González Valencia, leader of a shadowy cell known as "Los Cuinis." They soon drew together remnants from other Milenio cells and launched into a successful struggle with their Sinaloan allies against the Knights Templar and Zetas [see "Mata Zetas or Matazetas: Jalisco Nueva Generación Revival"].

This new CJNG cartel quickly defeated its Resistencia rivals and took undisputed control over the *milenios*' old smuggling networks, expanding in short order into neighboring Colima, northern Michoacán, and Guanajuato, and extending from coast to coast within only six months—making it one of the largest criminal gangs in Mexico by 2012. Jalisco Nueva Generación continued to push eastward and then northward, raising violence to new levels while corrupting and bloodying police and military personnel, and expanding into the U.S. market—becoming its main supplier of crystal meth, according to some analysts. The CJNG's rise to power was quite different from that of its secretive Cuini partners, who pursued a much more low-key approach, eschewing violence so as not to draw unwanted attention. Yet together, the CJNG and its stealthy Cuini partners were regarded as one of Mexico's most powerful criminal syndicates, many viewing it and the Sinaloans as the only true cartels left (years of law-enforcement pressure and

inter-cartel warfare having caused other groups to splinter into ever-smaller factions).

Operativo or Operación "Jalisco" (2015)

In December 2014, President Enrique Peña Nieto decided to refocus his administration's efforts in its ongoing campaigns against the cartels by shifting additional forces into the four most turbulent *foco rojo* or "red light" states in the country: Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Tamaulipas. Operation "Jalisco" was specifically intended to capture Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación leader Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera and disrupt his organization's many criminal activities. Preparations accelerated after CJNG gunmen killed five Federal Police officers and four civilians in a shootout on Manuel Martínez Street, between 1910 and Ramón Corona in the municipality of Ocotlán, Jalisco, shortly before 9:00 p.m. on March 19, 2015.

Then on April 6, 2015, about 80 CJNG gunmen sprang an ambush on a Fuerza Única convoy of Jalisco State policemen returning to their base in Guadalajara [2015 population: 1.46 million] from performing public-relations works along the Pacific coast around Puerto Vallarta, by burning cars on a bridge near the rural hamlet of Soyatán in the municipality of San Sebastián del Oeste so as to block their path, then opening fire upon the trapped column. Despite driving armored vehicles, 15 policemen were killed and 5 wounded by these *sicarios*' powerful firearms and grenade launchers, in the single bloodiest attack against Mexican officers in recent memory. [Authorities later said that these attacks were revenge for the state forces' killing of a popular CJNG *sicario* commander, Heriberto "El Gringo" Acevedo Cárdenas, in the municipality of Zacoalco de Torres on March 23—whose sheriff was also murdered by unknown assassins the very same day as this ambush.]

Deployments for the combined Operation "Jalisco" went ahead with greater purpose, but because so many preliminary pronouncements had been issued by various federal agencies, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel was well aware that a major offensive was imminent, and it had prepared accordingly. As soon as the first descents began before dawn on Friday, May 1, 2015—by Army and Navy personnel, plus federal agents and members of the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional or "National Security and Investigation Center" (CISEN)—the cartel leader was hastened by his security detail to a convoy of waiting vehicles, and sped off. Then when a French-made Mexican Air Force "Cougar" Eurocopter EC 725 SP spotted these heavily-armed *sicario* pickups racing from Villa Purificación along the highway toward Casimiro Castillo and began pursuing from the air, an RPG-7 round fired skyward struck its tail rotor around 7:00 a.m., causing the low-flying helicopter to make a violent crash-landing. Of the 11 troops aboard, plus two Federal Police officers and five-man crew, three of the soldiers were killed, with ten more military personnel and two policemen injured, plus the three others listed as "missing." A subsequent military sweep through the area found four abandoned vehicles, Oseguera having vanished.

Operation "Jalisco" began badly, hampered by numerous acts of vandalism prearranged by the CJNG, such as setting fires in banks and gasoline stations as diversions, as well as hijacking scores of buses and trucks to disable them at major intersections. Moreover, almost no arrests were

initially made, so that the news media and political commentators scornfully dismissed this government effort as an expensive failure. Former Colima Cartel leader and now CJNG lieutenant Gerardo "El Tecacho" or "El Cochi" Mendoza Chávez even launched attacks against Policía Federal units in March and May 2015, during which another airborne military helicopter was shot down. Yet despite reaping few rewards, the Army and federal agents persisted with their campaign, gradually making a string of unspectacular yet damaging captures:

- Víctor Manuel "El Mono" García Orozco, CJNG boss for the Ciénega Region around Lake Chapala, arrested in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga on May 28, 2015
- Rubén "El Menchito" Oseguera González, 25-year-old son of the CJNG leader, detained along with his criminal brother-in-law Julio Alberto Castillo Rodríguez on June 23, 2015
- Javier Guerrero Covarrubias, CJNG boss for Los Altos Region in Jalisco's eastern highlands, taken in Zapotlanejo on September 1, 2015
- Giovani "El Duende" Castro Urbano, CJNG boss for the Valles Region around Ameca (suspected of having ordered the ambush that killed 15 Fuerza Única policemen), arrested by soldiers in San Antonio Matute on September 22, 2015
- Daniel "Dany" Quintero Riestra, CJNG plaza-boss for metropolitan Guadalajara, apprehended without a shot being fired by soldiers and PGR agents while riding in a hired boat three miles off Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo, on October 13, 2015
- 31-year-old Iván "El Tanque" Cazarín Molina, CJNG second-in-command and a major money-launderer, captured along with three companions by Policía Federal agents without resistance at dawn on November 18, 2015, after an all-night party in the Hacienda de la Candelaria neighborhood of the municipality of Tlajomulco
- Antonio Oseguera Cervantes, 57-year-old brother of "El Mencho" Oseguera and CJNG financier and arms buyer, arrested without a shot being fired by soldiers and Federal Police on December 3, 2015

Their Cuini financial partners had also begun suffering losses that same year of 2015 and into 2016, while the CJNG fractured as of March 2017, a faction breaking away under Carlos Enrique "El Cholo" Sánchez Martínez and proclaiming itself the Cártel Nueva Plaza, setting off a wave of murders while fighting for supremacy. Jalisco Nueva Generación nonetheless remained sufficiently strong and defiant as to post a menacing *narcomanta* in the city of Puebla on the night of January 17–18, 2018, suspended from a pedestrian walkway overlooking the busy intersection of Periférico Ecológico and 16 de Septiembre Street. Accusing state governor Antonio Gali Fayad of favoring their bitter foes—*los mugrosos Z* or "the filthy Zetas"—the CJNG went on to warn that it would soon be coming to conduct a *limpia* or "purge" of Puebla and its San Miguel Prison, and that anyone found cooperating with its enemies "will be executed, whomever they might be—and most especially you, Gali." Eventually, *marino* special-forces detained Rosalinda González Valencia, wife of "El Mencho" Oseguera and reputedly also in charge of his syndicate's finances, on the night of Saturday, May 26, 2018, in Guadalajara's western suburb of Zapopan, along with Gerardo "El Cachas" Botello Rosales, underboss for Guanajuato and Michoacán.

See also: Mata Zetas or Matazetas: Jalisco Nueva Generación Revival; Milenio Cartel.

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Jardines del Humaya Cemetery.

Privately-run graveyard on the outskirts of Culiacán, Sinaloa, featuring a very expensive sector bristling with ostentatious mausoleums of slain drug-lords.

One of these crypts looks like a chapel with white columns, adorned with angels on stained-glass windows and a statue of Christ atop its roof; another—said to hold the remains of a Sinaloa Cartel hit-man—has a bulletproof glass door, surveillance cameras pointed at its entrance, a glass case holding four small swords, and a cross on its dome that lights up at night. Most feature air-conditioning, comfortable rooms with couches for visitors, and bathrooms, while some even have stairs leading to a second floor, plus roof terraces with fans. Others resemble small modern apartments with glass doors. As night falls, lights are automatically activated; many have alarm systems and solar panels.

Most mausoleums feature large pictures or paintings of the deceased on their walls, but few bear nameplates identifying the interred. The massive complex built for Arturo "El Pollo" Guzmán Loera, "El Chapo" Guzmán's brother, reportedly cost $12 million and features several bedrooms, 24-hour surveillance, air-conditioning, and a model-car collection. The two-story mausoleum of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, the "Boss of Bosses"—estimated cost: $600,000—looks like a small castle and features satellite television, wireless internet connection, kitchen, bedrooms, and a burglar alarm. [In a bizarre touch, someone placed a human head adorned with "a decorative flower tucked behind one ear" beside this garish tomb in January 2010, its decapitated corpse being found at the graveyard's opposite end, suggesting that some of his former gang may have presented this gory tribute as an offering to their departed boss.]

Many evenings, the cemetery comes alive as luxury SUVs and pickups begin arriving after the front gates have closed at 5:00 p.m., unloading cases of beer and liquors, and accompanied by musical bands and women, to spend the night partying with their loved ones. Vengeful attacks by rivals against mourning relatives or gang associates have also been known to occur.

See also: Jesús Malverde; San Judas; Santa Muerte.

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Jesús Malverde (1909–Present).

Mythical bandit, popularly worshipped today as the "patron saint of drug traffickers," especially in his native Sinaloa.

Legend (1870–1909)

Supposedly, this fictional character had been born in the municipality of Mocorito into a poor family of mixed Yoreme and Spanish heritage, being christened as Jesús Juárez Mazo. Orphaned at a tender age—his parents dying either from hunger or a curable illness—the teenager became an outlaw renowned for his generosity to the poor under the alias of "Jesús Malverde," during the despotic rule of Porfirio Díaz. According to one legend, Malverde would steal gold coins from rich hacienda owners, then leave these at poor people's doors in the night. The corrupt Francisco Cañedo ran Sinaloa in those days, and according to another tale, derisively offered Malverde a pardon if he could steal the governor's sword (or in some versions, his daughter), which the renegade accomplished—goading an angry Cañedo into having him hunted down.

Malverde allegedly died in Culiacán on May 3, 1909—either betrayed and killed by a friend, or hanged from a tree near its railway station by the police, so that his rotting body might serve as a warning to other miscreants. In this latter version, as his remains disintegrated and fell to the ground, a local custom began whereby people would surreptitiously give him a "proper burial" by tossing a few stones at a time onto his resting place, gradually covering him up.

Popular "Sainthood" (1910–Present Day)

However, no historical records have ever been found verifying Malverde's existence, activities, or death, this story having most likely been elaborated over many years. Gradually, a cairn of stones dedicated to his memory appeared in Culiacán during the early 20th century, from the local persistence in tossing stones onto his "gravesite" as a sign of respect—an act that furthermore entitled the person to petition his spirit for help. It is said that criminal solicitants have become convinced that in order for a request to be granted, Malverde must be presented with a gift or token—however insignificant—that has been stolen. A large party is held every year at his shrine on the anniversary of Malverde's supposed death on May 3, despite the fact that the original chapel was built amid great controversy and a replacement erected in 1969 on Independencia Avenue, less than a block from the State *Palacio de Gobierno* or "Government Legislature." The original site, converted into a parking lot, has since been revived as an unofficial shrine, with its own cairn of stones and offerings.

Although not a figure recognized by the Catholic Church, modern drug-traffickers such as Rafael Caro Quintero, Ernesto Fonseca, and Amado Carrillo Fuentes—attracted by Jesús Malverde's "Robin Hood" reputation of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor—began adopting him as their "patron saint" during the 1970s, so that his image is now widely available on busts, baseball caps, T-shirts, candles, oils, incense, sachet powders, bath crystals, soap, lithographed prints, etc. He is invariably depicted in tight black trousers and a white cowboy shirt, with a neat black moustache and hat-design favored in northern

Mexico. A smaller shrine was recently built in his honor on Dr. Vértiz Street in Mexico City's tough Colonia Doctores, while a martini bar in the capital's chic Condesa district further took his name, attracting crowds of young moneyed partiers known as *fresas*.

In New York City, one of the questions posed to prospective jurors for the November 2018 trial of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, was: "Are you familiar with Jesús Malverde?" In Culiacán, his chapel is featured on maps distributed by the municipal tourism-board, and it is said that one of the thousands of personal requests left at his shrine reads:

> *Thanks, boss. Today I humbly ask you for only Juárez and Tijuana. As for the rest, infinite thanks: JGL [Joaquín Guzmán Loera] "El Chapo."*

See also: Caro Quintero, Rafael; Carrillo Fuentes, Amado.

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Journalism. Perilous profession in Mexico, especially for crime-beat reporters and political commentators dealing with the drug wars.

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 1,262 Mexican reporters have been killed since 1992, and another 812 nearly murdered; by 2012, Mexico was rated the fourth most-deadly country for reporting, topped only by Syria, Somalia, and Pakistan—those who dared "to cover drug-trafficking, corruption, and organized-crime's infiltration of local and federal government" being particularly threatened. Critics of the party in power, cabinet ministers, and police agencies have long been subjected to retaliation for any unflattering coverage or embarrassing revelations, usually in the form of beatings at the hands of undercover agents. Exposures of bribery carried the additional fear of offending a powerful crime-boss.

Most young journalists and editors—being easily replaceable—had to endure low and irregular pay from their employers, with few if any benefits until they gained some experience and outside sources of income, so they initially had to hustle for a living. Planting stories for a fee in newspapers and broadcasts is a common practice, harmless when confined to the society pages or retail commerce, but more complicated once it comes to involve cutthroat businesses.

Criminal Manipulation

Bosses have long recognized the potential problems from adverse public opinion, wishing to deflect it from their machinations and, if possible, redirect it against their foes. For example, following the all-powerful Guadalajara Cartel's dismemberment in spring 1985, regional bosses quickly

began claiming territories, the coveted border-crossing at Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, being disputed between the corrupt 35-year-old Rafael Aguilar Guajardo—former *comandante* of its Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" (DFS) detachment—and a rival claimant, Gilberto "El Greñas" Ontiveros Lucero.

Aguilar triumphed by planting a false story from a fictitious DEA agent in the December 20, 1985, editions of *El Universal* and *El Fronterizo* newspapers, accusing Ontiveros of financing "narcotics-trafficking from Ciudad Juárez, by smuggling not only marijuana cargoes through the Valle district into the United States, but also stronger drugs such as heroin and cocaine." Soon, government officials were being peppered with inquiries, police surveillance and raids had to be stepped up, and "El Greñas" Ontiveros' operations suffered accordingly. Next spring, this false charge was even picked up by the *El Paso Herald Post*, and a frustrated Ontiveros threatened to kill its American reporter, Terrence Poppa, and photographer Al Gutiérrez on April 23, 1986—being arrested two days later because of official U.S. complaints, freeing Aguilar to seize the undisputed title of Juárez's *plaza* boss.

Other similar attempts would be made, such as when Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén—seeking to divert attention from his illegal activities in Tamaulipas—planted a lie during the summer of 2001 through his attorney Juan Guerrero Chapa in various mass-circulation national publications, alleging that a nonexistent "Monterrey Cartel" had emerged and represented a serious new threat, supposedly headed by three of his competitors: Edelio "El Yeyo" López Falcón; Rolando "El Role" López Salinas; and Mario "La Gata" Ramírez. After a few weeks of intense press scrutiny of these three bosses' activities, José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos—director of the Unidad Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Organized Crime Unit" (UEDO)—debunked this unfounded story of a fictitious syndicate at a news conference in Mexico City.

Cartel Intimidation

But as drug lords amassed immense power and influence, attacks on journalists became more brutal and brazen, some reporters who revealed damaging information about their criminal designs being treated as outright enemies. When Francisco J. Ortiz Franco—the Tijuana weekly *ZETA*'s lead editor—published passport photos of 71 Arellano Cartel *sicarios*, which they intended to use in acquiring fake Baja California state credentials, he was shot to death in his parked car in broad daylight on June 22, 2004, while his horrified 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son watched from the backseat.

Yet no cartel could match the suffocating grip that the Zetas clamped on media outlets in their conquered territories. A newly graduated journalist—hired for his first newspaper job in Tamaulipas—was informed shortly after arriving by a veteran newsman that he and 13 fellow novices had been summoned by the local Zeta *vocero* or "spokesman" to a predawn meeting, "and what would happen if we did not attend." Arriving together at 3:00 a.m. in a dark public park, they were each asked in turn to provide extensive personal data—name, address, marital status, relatives, etc.—which was meticulously recorded into a notebook. The *vocero* thereupon informed them of the rules:

- No one could publish any story, without first running it past him.

- No one could ignore phone calls from the syndicate.
- No one could refuse to accept the weekly Zeta stipends (known as *piscacha* or *chayote*) sent to the newsroom, or else they would be regarded "as an enemy."

Those who did not wish to abide by these terms must immediately resign and leave town; those who accepted would be "punished" for not complying with these regulations at any time in the future, regardless of any changes in cartel leadership. Already intimidated by the daily sight of columns of heavily-armed Zeta pickups driving boldly through the streets, "outnumbering those of the state police," every reporter present agreed. In time, Valencia would learn that he could still cover gruesome crime stories—"five bodies cut into pieces, ten people hanged from bridges, four murder-victims whose corpses had been cast into the street, wrapped in sheets"—but only Zeta brutalities could be published, not any rival counterstrikes.

When civil war erupted between the Zetas and Gulf Cartel in February 2010, the latter dug in at Reynosa and began tempting local journalists (who typically earned $400 a month) with additional monthly payments of $500 apiece to underreport the violence that had already claimed more than 100 lives in three weeks—a news blackout intended to "keep their war against the Zetas as quiet as possible, so as to avoid any Army deployments which might interrupt their operations."

And as Zeta strength collapsed three years later, they launched desperate attacks against all reporting: during the first week of May 2013 alone, Radio Grande de Coahuila announcer José Gerardo Padillo Blanquet vanished from the state-capital Saltillo (his director having been beaten a few months previously). The hacked remains of 22-year-old news photographer Daniel Alejandro Martínez, who had just started working for the *Vanguardia* newspaper, were also found in the middle of a busy street, while 21-year-old Diego and 20-year-old Alfredo Paramo—sons of the prominent financial journalist David Paramo, a radio-show host and columnist with a national following, and Martha Gonzalez, editor of an El Paso newspaper—were shot dead that same Saturday, being pitilessly chased down by gunmen in a car.

See also: Juárez Cartel: Emergence under Aguilar Guajardo.

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Juárez Cartel (1985–Present).

One of Mexico's oldest and most lucrative drug-trafficking syndicates, despite having been depleted in recent

years by a brutal takeover-attempt engineered by the Sinaloa Cartel.

Emergence under Aguilar Guajardo (1985–1992)

Because of its strategic location directly on the Chihuahua-Texas border, Ciudad Juárez already had a long-established reputation for contraband liquor, cigarettes, stolen cars, gambling, and prostitution. The swelling volume of marijuana and heroin flowing out of its mountainous interior into the United States during the 1970s made this transit-point significantly more valuable, growing exponentially after high-priced Colombian cocaine exports were added during the early 1980s. Initially, the Guadalajara Cartel distantly directed Juárez operations through Ernesto "Don Neto" Fonseca Carrillo, until its leadership was decimated for their role in the cruel murder of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena in February 1985.

Regional bosses thereupon began laying claim to territories, Juárez already being dominated by the corrupt 35-year-old Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, former *comandante* of its Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" detachment (the DFS, soon to be disbanded). He defeated the rival claimant Gilberto "El Greñas" Ontiveros Lucero by planting a false story from a fictitious DEA agent in the December 20, 1985, editions of *El Universal* and *El Fronterizo* newspapers, alleging that Ontiveros "finances narcotics-trafficking from Ciudad Juárez, by smuggling not only marijuana cargoes through the Valle district into the United States, but also stronger drugs such as heroin and cocaine." More stories followed, picked up next spring by the *El Paso Herald Post*, until Ontiveros threatened to kill its American reporter, Terrence Poppa, and photographer Al Gutiérrez on April 23, 1986. Ontiveros was arrested two days later, leaving Aguilar free to monopolize dealings with the Medellín suppliers, while entering into partnerships with the wealthy regional magnate Gerardo Terrazas S. and major trafficker Rafael Muñoz Talavera, owner of a trendy El Paso shopping-center and lavish rural mansion.

By 1988, the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) intelligence unit in Mexico City was noting that Juárez's traffickers were not only bribing Mexican officials, but U.S. Customs inspectors as well. One Gustavo Tavo Silvera was a Juárez Cartel contact for American inspectors at El Paso's Zaragoza and Sante Fe bridges, who were paid:

> *. . . $10,000 for each car that was allowed to cross. Each car would sometimes be loaded with as much as 300 kilograms in drugs.*

During 1988–1989, it was estimated that Aguilar supervised the transit of 250 tons of cocaine, with a street value perhaps totaling $21 billion—and whose proceeds went much further in Mexico because of the favorable exchange-rate. His title was recognized when the incarcerated Guadalajara Cartel *padrino* or "godfather" Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo assigned Juárez's *plaza* to Aguilar at a criminal summit held in the spring of 1989 at Acapulco [see "Plaza"].

But covetous challengers soon appeared: the Carrillo Fuentes brothers Amado, Vicente, Alberto, and Rodolfo—nephews of the incarcerated Guadalajara Cartel cofounder Ernesto Fonseca—had taken complete control of all traffic flowing through the smaller border-city of Ojinaga, 190 miles southeast of Juárez. As their excess loads began circulating through

Juárez, Amado Carrillo transferred his headquarters into the larger city, at first being welcomed by his nominal cartel superior Aguilar. Frictions nonetheless grew and came to a head in early 1993, after a heated public argument in El Rodeo Restaurant during which the ex-DFS *comandante* slapped Carrillo.

Usurpation and Preeminence under Amado Carrillo (1993–1997)

Shortly thereafter, Aguilar was killed while on Easter vacation with his family at Cancún, Quintana Roo, gunned down from a pair of passing cars while standing on a dock after a pleasure-boat outing on April 12, 1993. His partner, Rafael Muñoz, having been arrested seven months previously in Tijuana, Amado Carrillo and his brothers had the only remaining cartel successor—Cuauhtémoc Ortiz, another ex-DFS agent—abducted in Mexico City on May 6, 1993, and tortured to death. [For greater details, see "Carrillo Fuentes, Amado: Rise to Power."]

That same month, 37-year-old Amado Carrillo laid claim to the title of Juárez Cartel boss and its subsidiary smuggling-corridors into West Texas and New Mexico, and during the three years that he would run this criminal enterprise, it reaped enormous profits—the DEA estimating that its drug trafficking alone earned an average of $200 million a week. Carrillo achieved this escalation through buying secondhand airliners to fly in much larger cocaine cargoes, permitting his organization to handle four times the amount of all competitors combined and gaining him the nickname "Lord of the Skies." After a joint U.S.-Colombian operation wiped out the Cali Cartel leadership during the summer of 1995, Carrillo moved swiftly to bypass their successors by buying directly from South American sources, a tactic greatly enhancing profit-margins by cutting out these middlemen. [For greater details, see "Carrillo Fuentes, Amado: 'Lord of the Skies' and New Trafficking Arrangement."]

A 1995 CIA report described his expanded cartel's operations:

> *Much of the actual movement of narcotics across the border, especially in Ciudad Juárez, is subcontracted to groups that specialize in only this aspect of trans-shipment. The drugs are then re-collected by Juárez Cartel associates, who forward the narcotics to distribution centers throughout the U.S. One such route from Ciudad Juárez to Sylmar, California, was believed to have carried over 250 tons of cocaine before it was disrupted.*

Yet fearful of assassins, Amado Carrillo spent the last year of his tenure an international nomad, leaving the actual management of his booming cartel to subordinates and affiliates Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno, Juan José "El Juanjo" Quintero Payán, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, his brother Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo Fuentes, the lawyer Rubén Ángel Moreno, and the Beltrán Leyva brothers. When the "Lord of the Skies" died accidentally while undergoing plastic surgery in Mexico City in July 1997, intelligence analysts discovered that the far-flung operations radiating out from his Juárez *plaza* were split up among his brother Vicente Carrillo, "El Mayo" Zambada, "El Azul" Esparragoza, and Arturo Beltrán Leyva.

Vicente Carrillo's Troubled Succession (1997–2003)

The core Juárez Cartel operation fell to Amado Carrillo's 34-year-old brother, Vicente, and "El Azul" Esparragoza, but

the former lacked his older brother's deftness. Outlying associates began to waver, and many willingly joined as semiautonomous partners into a loose Federación that Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán formed in October 2001 to provide mutual assistance and jointly combat enemies. As head of what was still the richest cartel, Vicente Carrillo condescendingly joined this affiliation, and furthermore allied himself with El Chapo's Sinaloans to recuperate the border crossing at Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, whose local gang had been Juárez Cartel tributaries before being crushed by a sudden Gulf Cartel thrust out of Matamoros spearheaded by the fearsome Zetas in March 2002.

However, Vicente Carrillo left much of the subsequent Nuevo Laredo counteroffensive to the Milenio and Sinaloa Cartels, while delegating Juárez's contribution to his youngest brother, Rodolfo "El Niño de Oro"—who was hostile toward El Chapo and contemptuous of his "Federation." After the failure of Guzmán's attempt to seize the Gulf Cartel's second-in-command, Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén, while his older brother Osiel was being arrested in Matamoros on March 14, 2003, "Rodolfillo" insulted Guzmán's *sicarios* at a subsequent meeting and ignored his proffered handshake. Later that same night, he also wounded and briefly abducted El Chapo's mercenary José Antonio "El Jaguar" Torres Marrufo from a bar restroom—after having initially approached to "apologize" for insulting his boss.

First Hostilities with the Sinaloans (2004)

Resentful that the Juárez Cartel had committed so little toward their joint endeavor of recapturing Nuevo Laredo, and angry because these supposed allies had furthermore executed a couple of El Chapo's traffickers for trespassing in Juárez-claimed territory, Guzmán eventually severed this alliance by sending a hit squad to assassinate the executioner—Rodolfo Carrillo—in Culiacán on September 11, 2004. A wave of murders and countermurders ensued, peaking at 250 a month, but with numerous Juárez associates now siding with the Sinaloans. A PGR report issued that next year indicated that while the Juárez and Gulf Cartels each maintained a presence in 21 states, the Sinaloa Cartel was now in 17, and the Tijuana Cartel of the Arellano Félix brothers had been reduced to only 4 states.

Hostilities gradually eased, and affiliates began warily dealing with one another again, while the Sinaloans finally gave up on their attempts to reclaim Nuevo Laredo and had their *sicario* leader Arturo Beltrán sign a truce with its Zeta occupiers in May 2007. But Guzmán and his business partner Ismael Zambada—aggrieved by usurious *derecho de piso* fees demanded by the Juárez Cartel for transiting drugs anywhere near their border city—began to lay the groundwork for wresting control of its coveted *plaza* from Vicente Carrillo. El Chapo raised a small army several-thousand strong, secretly training them in distant Veracruz and equipping them with high-powered weaponry, Army uniforms, armored pickups with the name *Gente Nueva* ("New People") stenciled on their side panels, etc.

War for Ciudad Juárez (2007–2009)

Toward the end of 2007, Guzmán began sending advance elements of his Gente Nueva or "GN" (sometimes called Los Chapos) under the command of "El Jaguar" Torres Marrufo to infiltrate Juárez and its suburbs, gathering intelligence and

contacting local criminals disgruntled with Vicente Carrillo. Learning that his "La Línea" *sicarios* employed an older street-gang dubbed *Barrio Azteca* as auxiliaries ("Aztec Neighborhood," originally formed in 1986 by Hispanic inmates in El Paso jails, members being known simply as Aztecas), the Sinaloans began recruiting among their opponents—the loosely affiliated Artistas Asesinos—to have these serve as their own lookouts, couriers, guards, enforcers, and even contract hit-men.

Actual fighting broke out on January 5, 2008, when five men were shot dead with AR-15s within a few hours, followed by several policemen and nearly two-dozen civilians over the next few days. Juárez would be plunged into four years of unbridled shootings, abductions, extortions, torture, and cruel executions, aggravated by the loss of 90,000 jobs as the United States entered a severe recession, marooning a host of desperate unemployed as its *maquiladora* factories shut down. Almost 500 troops were flown in as reinforcements aboard three Hercules and a Boeing 727/100 as early as March 28, 2008, followed next day by 1,100 more, to be dispersed throughout the troubled city and eight adjacent municipalities in an attempt to stem the violence, which had produced more than 200 murders over the preceding three months—to no avail. The war raged on, young auxiliaries on both sides fighting with utter disregard of humanity, suffering disproportionately higher casualties and being cheaply replaced by their callous handlers. Juárez's number of homicides multiplied from 310 in 2007 to 1,607 the next year and 2,754 by 2009.

La Línea also raised its own elite 80-man paramilitary company called the *Linces* ("Lynxes" or "Bobcats") to counter Gente Nueva's advantages by making targeted strikes, operating in squads of no more than five men, usually armed with first-class, sophisticated weaponry and equipment. Martin Hugo Valenzuela Rivera, arrested on December 26, 2008, by the Army in Chihuahua, described them as follows:

> *Many times I was the chauffeur for Los Linces, who I drove around. I only knew them by sight and knew them to be members of military groups such as the GAFE (Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales or Special-Forces Airmobile Group) which is a very powerful special-forces unit of the Mexican Army trained by the world's special-forces, but now work for La Línea. Their sole function is to execute people they have been ordered to kill. They move around in different types of vehicles, and are always driven by someone else. We always met them in homes inside gated communities, and saw them with a vast amount of equipment such as ballistic vests, helmets, long rifles, assault weapons, and even grenades.*

A former police officer added that whenever Los Linces went into action:

> *We only protect the area where they are going to operate. We circled the block to see if there is any law enforcement activity. We only communicate with them by radio.*

The Juárez Cartel nevertheless struggled to sustain its lucrative trafficking operations throughout this ordeal, profits contracting while rival Zetas made territorial inroads into eastern Chihuahua during their confinement and erosion of strength within their stronghold. Violent outbursts recurred, federal authorities repeatedly mounting efforts to restore some measure of peace for Juárez's long-suffering citizenry (civic authorities estimating that 8,000 legitimate businesses were being regularly extorted by gangs, desperate for cash). Even 350 elite

GAFEs were flown into Juárez aboard a Hercules transport on December 28, 2009, to replace outgunned Policía Militar contingents—although like other units before them, these special forces had to limit themselves to holding a few key fortified strongpoints and making lonely patrols through dark city streets at night, avoided by civilians and criminals alike.

Suffering (2010)

This protracted urban struggle's pitiless nature was encapsulated by endless atrocities, such as the Villas de Salvárcar mass murder of innocent young partygoers: late on a Saturday evening, January 31, 2010, about 60 youths were celebrating the victory of their "Jaguares" American football team in a private home at 1310 Villa del Portal Street, in the tranquil Villas de Salvárcar working-class neighborhood on Juárez's southeastern side, when at least 20 hit-men pulled up in a half-dozen vehicles and opened fire indiscriminately from its front doorway, killing 16 and wounding 12—all victims being between 15 and 20 years of age. Two days later, a Juárez Cartel *sicario* from La Línea gang named Óscar Dolores Arroyo Chavarría was arrested by the Army and presented before a press conference on February 2, 2010, where he claimed that this attack had been erroneously ordered by his boss José Antonio "El Diego" Acosta Hernández after receiving an inaccurate telephoned tip that this gathering was made up of *doblados* (members of the rival Artistas Asesinos, allies of the Sinaloa Cartel), and so carried out by their own auxiliary Aztecas. However, no charges could be filed because of a lack of witnesses or hard evidence, leaving the victims' brokenhearted parents to repudiate conjectures about their children's gang affiliations.

A half-dozen SUVs also arrived outside the three-story *Centro Cristiano "Fe y Vida"* or "'Faith and Life' Christian Center" drug-rehabilitation center, at the corner of Tarahumara and Belisario Domínguez Streets in Colonia Villa Nueva at the north end of Chihuahua City, shortly before 11:00 p.m. on June 10, 2010. Despite standing only a few hundred yards from the city's *Seguridad Pública Municipal* or "Municipal Public Safety" headquarters, 25–30 *sicarios* armed with AK-47s and AR-15s kicked down the center's outer door and penetrated to its upper floor, where they massacred 19 trapped residents and wounded another four within ten minutes (forensic investigators later recuperating 184 spent casings). The killers then spray-painted a message reading "This is what happens to pigs, rats, killers, kidnappers, rapists," and departed unmolested before any policemen dared put in an appearance. Local residents attributed this brutal assault to the presence of active members of the Mexicles and Artistas Asesinos street-gangs within the center. [The Mexicles having been founded in 1987 by the Mexican-born José "El Maestro" Márquez at Cofield State Prison in Tennessee Colony, Texas, to unite Hispanic inmates against rival gangs; in 1994 they formed an alliance with the Barrio Azteca to fight a three-year war against the Texas Syndicate.]

A horrifying new tactic was unveiled next month, after Federal Police agents on July 14, 2010, arrested Jesús Armando "El 35" Acosta Guerrero—an Azteca street-gang member and La Línea's third-in-command for central Juárez and Anapra, under the overall command of Juan Pablo "El JL" Ledezma. Angry that the federal government seemed to be favoring the Sinaloans through such one-sided interventions, Armando Acosta and his immediate superior José Antonio "El Diego" Acosta

Hernández discussed over the phone a way of protesting, by copying a tactic seen on television from Iraq's occupation: luring opponents into a trap and detonating a remotely controlled car-bomb.

Consequently, around 7:30 p.m. on July 15, 2010, anonymous phone calls reported that a municipal policeman lay face down, bound and bleeding near the intersection of Bolivia and 16 de Septiembre Streets in Colonia Ex-Hipódromo, not far from Federal Police headquarters. In reality, this individual was a suspected Sinaloa Cartel member who had been abducted by La Línea, tortured almost to death, and then dressed in a police uniform before being dumped in the street. A Good Samaritan, Dr. José Guillermo Ortiz Collazo, emerged from his nearby private clinic to attend to this prostrate victim, and as the first Federal Police pickups and ambulances began arriving on scene, a parked green Ford Focus—packed with metal shards and roughly 22 pounds of Tovex, a water-gel explosive commonly substituted for dynamite in underground blasting—exploded, its detonator activated by an observer dialing a cell phone. The blast killed a federal policeman, a paramedic, and Dr. Ortiz, while injuring seven other innocent bystanders.

Such an indiscriminate attack, in a city already traumatized by two and a half years of relentless murders and violence, added to the dread gripping its populace. Fears were further heightened when graffiti sprayed on an elementary school next Monday, July 19, 2010, threatened that more car-bombs would be set off unless American FBI and DEA agents were allowed to investigate the alleged complicity between Mexico's "corrupt federal authorities" and "El Chapo" Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel. But when La Línea attempted to detonate a second car-bomb a few weeks later, it failed, while a third shortly thereafter produced only a feeble, partial blast.

Another egregious instance of random violence occurred around 11:00 p.m. on Friday, October 22, 2010, when two carloads of gunmen chased an Artistas Asesinos member known as Ratón or "Mouse" into a pair of adjoining houses at 2063 and 2069 Arquitectos Street, near its intersection with Félix Candela Street in Juárez's crowded Colonia Horizontes del Sur district. Moments later, three or four *sicarios* burst in, demanding to know whose car had just been left parked outside—and when nobody answered, opened fire into the defenseless crowd, spraying more than 70 high-velocity rounds from AK-47s and AR-15s which killed 14 young people and badly wounded 19 more, before these attackers withdrew. [Neighbors and survivors would later declare that three minutes after this slaughter, patrolling federal agents drove past and—despite screamed pleas for help—continued on their way and did not return to the crime scene until almost half an hour afterward.]

Rumors initially suggested that these murderers had been Aztecas, bitter foes of the Artistas Asesinos, although this fact could never be confirmed. Families of the deceased reportedly received threats of attacks against their church and graveside ceremonies if the victims were not buried within one hour of their funeral services, so as to quickly inter any evidence related to this crime. Eight and a half months later, the Juárez Cartel lieutenant and Aztecas gang-leader "El Diego" Acosta was arrested in Chihuahua City and implicated in almost 1,500 murders—including those of the innocent young Horizontes del Sur victims.

Reduced Status (2011–Present)

The number of homicides in Ciudad Juárez continued to soar from 3,117 in 2010 to

3,622 next year, while fighting began to reach into all combatants' upper-echelons: Gente Nueva experiencing losses among its senior leadership when "El Flaco" Salgueiro Nevárez was captured on October 4, 2011, followed by "El Jaguar" Torres—taken in León, Guanajuato, on February 3, 2012, and charged with drug trafficking plus kidnapping, extortion, and murder of persons affiliated with the Juárez Cartel (in addition to being wanted in the United States for trafficking and as a recipient of high-powered weaponry smuggled into Mexico as part of the ATF's "Fast and Furious" undercover operation). Another Salgueiro Nevárez brother—José "El Ché"—followed them into captivity in late October 2012 from Hidalgo del Parrral, where he had been managing large-scale marijuana production.

By this date, the exhausted Juárez Cartel had been defeated by El Chapo and fallen far from its heyday during the 1990s, barely retaining control over several municipalities in northern Chihuahua and with only a moderate presence in certain sectors of Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, and Coahuila. Its organizational structure had also changed significantly, from that of a criminal syndicate with a vertical chain-of-command into dispersed groups and cells operating semi-independently, such as La Línea and Barrio Azteca. The 51-year-old Vicente Carrillo himself was finally arrested along with two of his bodyguards on October 9, 2014, by a joint task-force of soldiers and federal policemen manning a roadblock in Torreón, Coahuila—without a shot being fired. He was immediately flown to the SEIDO offices in Mexico City and, after two days of interrogation, charged with organized crime and drug-trafficking offenses, then remanded on October 14 to the federal maximum-security Puente Grande prison in Jalisco. Gente Nueva subsequently disappeared altogether as well, after its last Salgueiro Nevárez leader—Heriberto—was apprehended in February 2015.

See also: Carrillo Fuentes, Amado; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; *Plaza*.

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Ten years ago, we measured drug seizures in grams and pounds. Today, we routinely measure seizures in tons—even multi-tons.

—DEA Administrator Thomas A. Constantine, appearing before the U. S. Senate (August 1995)

Kaibiles (1974–Present). Intensely-trained Guatemalan special-forces, notorious for their ferocity, some of whom have worked for Mexican cartels as mercenaries, instructors, or bodyguards.

Foundation (1974–1975)

On September 20, 1974, Guatemalan Infantry Major Pablo Nuila Hub presented a study to Colonel Ovidio Morales, chief of the *Segunda Sección* or "Second Section" of the Army High Command, proposing the creation of a commando course for training a company of elite soldiers, with instruction to be provided by Guatemalan officers who had already received similar training abroad. With his project approved, a large remote area in the northern extremity of the Department of El Petén was selected for establishing a facility, near an existing military encampment for the *Destacamento* or Detachment "La Pólvora"—a steamy spot nicknamed *el Infierno* or "Hell," near to Melchor de Mencos.

Infantry Major Jaime Rabanales Reyes, having been designated to supervise this school's creation, traveled into that inhospitable area to conduct an initial survey on November 12, 1974, accompanied by Major Nuila, who reported themselves ready to receive the first clearance-crews by December 5. While construction of its first buildings commenced, Lieutenant Colonel Rodolfo Lobos Zamora of the High Command's *Tercera Sección* or "Third Section" directed Majors Rabanales and Nuila on March 4, 1975, to come up with a more suitable name for their future training-camp, rather than just a "commando school." Since Major Nulia had recently read a history of the heroic Mayan warrior-prince Kaibil Balam, who had successfully resisted the 16th-century Spanish Conquistadors, he proposed that this new facility's name should be *Escuela de Adiestramiento y Operaciones Especiales Kaibil* or "Kaibil Training and Special Operations School," which was approved. Any graduate would have the right to call himself a Kaibil, which in the native Mam dialect meant: "One who has the strength and cunning of two tigers."

Earliest Deployments and Clouded Reputation (1978–1988)

The first graduates from this harsh military school found ready employment during the late 1970s in Guatemala's cruel civil war, which had already been raging for more than 15 years and was just entering into its most virulent phase. As the government and ruling classes sought to crush rebellious sentiments festering among the masses of urban and rural poor, dozens upon dozens of brutal killings would be carried out as intimidation tactics by policemen, soldiers, and hired mercenaries—most going

uninvestigated and unpunished by the authorities. It is almost certain that *kaibiles* participated in any number of these atrocities, although they were specifically identified in only a few instances:

- the massacre of 150 Q'eqchi or Kekchi natives shot during a protest march in the central square of Panzós, Alta Verapaz on May 29, 1978, it being recorded how Kaibiles were flown in afterward by helicopter to seal off this town, and—being a counterinsurgency unit—were probably employed in hunting down some of the thousands of runaways who had fled up into the hills (and whose bodies would come drifting downriver out of the jungle over the next few weeks);
- the July 1982 massacre at the estate and hamlet known as San Francisco Rentón in the Departamento de Huehuetenango, a remote highland district close to the Mexican border, where a couple of hundred residents—men, women, and children—were indiscriminately slaughtered;
- a public display of brutality staged at Chajul in the Department of El Quiché on September 24, 1979, when 500 soldiers arrived with seven tortured "subversive suspects" and—after an hour and a half of threatening harangues—poured gasoline over their heads and Kaibiles set them ablaze, all the while shouting "Long live the fatherland! Long live Guatemala! Long live our president! Long live the Army!";
- and most notoriously of all, when a contingent of 58 Kaibiles disguised as rebel guerrillas entered the native town of Dos Erres near La Libertad in the northern Department of Petén on the morning of December 6, 1982, torturing the men and raping the women until almost the entire community had been murdered by that afternoon, their bodies being thrown down a well or left in nearby fields: 251 defenseless people, 113 of whom were under the age of 14.

On January 12, 1989, the Kaibil training-facilities were relocated from their original El Infierno site to the Zona Militar Número 23 base at Poptún in the Department of Petén, and that same October 1989 the *kaibiles* were reformed into two companies designated as the Army's *Primera* and *Segunda Compañías de Fusileros* or "First and Second Fusilier Companies." Both subsequently became jointly known as the *Agrupamiento de Fuerzas Especiales* or "Special-Forces Grouping" as of January 29, 1990, with each company being subdivided into six *destacamentos* or "detachments." Eventually, a *Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales Kaibil* or "Kaibil Special-Forces Brigade" would be constituted as of July 1, 2004, by merging the existing three Kaibil companies with the Primera Compañía de Fusileros or "First Fusiliers Company."

This formation would be shifted in 2008 into the former Zona Militar Número 6 base at Puerto Barrios in the Department of Izabal, before being redeployed in May–June 2012 into frontline positions around the mountain hamlet of El Subín, about 60 miles from the Mexican border, then returned to Poptún by 2013. Its tactical units were described as 16-man *secciones*, consisting of two 8-man *patrullas* or "patrols," each armed with at least one MAG or Galil LMG ("light machine-gun") and a grenade launcher. Their ranks included platoons of specialized snipers, "search-and-destroy" teams, night troops, as well as hostage-rescue and demolition experts. Unfortunately, the fact that this brigade was kept chronically understrength at a battalion

size of 300 commandos, plus 200 support troops, meant that hundreds of Kaibil Academy graduates would have but brief tours as active-service members before being moved into other assignments or the reserves, creating a large pool of idled *kaibiles* willing to serve as high-paid mercenaries in Mexico.

Mexican Army and Naval Kaibiles (1987–2012)

Despite the many claims that have sprung up about Mexican Army special-forces being sent to receive advanced training at the Kaibil Academy, the Secretaría de Defensa Nacional or "Secretariat of National Defense" (Sedena's) official records indicate that only 37 were ever actually dispatched during the years 1987–2002, ending when Mexico's own GAFE companies began to be scaled back in size. The largest number sent into Guatemala in any single year was six in 1995, while the Mexican special-forces were just being constituted and new training-facilities were only being built. And of the 37 volunteer subalterns sent to take special courses in Guatemala, 29 graduated successfully, 3 failed, 1 died of a heart attack during a military exercise, and 4 deserted.

It is also possible that some of the slightly more than 1,000 Mexican subalterns and NCOs who received GAFE training in irregular warfare between 1995 and 1999 at Xmotoc, their training base located near the Guatemalan border about 30 miles outside Chetumal, Quintana Roo, may have had a few supplementary classes from visiting Kaibil instructors. As for the Navy, only ten *marinos* from the Infantería de Marina were ever sent to undergo Kaibil training, starting in 2006, three of whom graduated. Therefore, the boast of cartel *sicarios* such as Óscar Osvaldo García Montoya—leader of the Mano con Ojos gang, who upon his capture in August 2011 claimed to have been serving as a corporal with the 4o. Batallón de Infantería de Marina or "Fourth Naval Infantry Battalion" (BIM-4) at La Paz, Baja California, when he was sent to receive Kaibil training in Guatemala—was an obvious lie, said to enhance his reputation.

First Zeta Affiliations and Recruitment (2002–2007)

Although few in numbers, the initial core of Mexican Army deserters hired to serve as mercenaries in 2000 by Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén—soon dubbed the Zetas—included a dozen-and-a-half former GAFE special-forces such as this paramilitary group's founders Arturo (Z-1) Guzmán Decena and Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano, who were well aware of the Kaibiles' reputation for ferocious psy-ops terror tactics. The Guatemalan Army, in turn, would train over 6,000 *kaibiles* between 1975 and 2011—yet only a maximum of 360 could find active-duty employment in its brigade in any given year; and with privates' monthly salaries at a paltry $250 (Kaibiles receiving an additional $38 "transportation bonus"), idled graduates in the "reserves" were often tempted by the $2,000 a month being offered by the cartels.

Consequently, when Cárdenas ordered all of his Zetas to begin undergoing regular military refresher-courses in September 2001 at his Las Amarillas Ranch outside China, Nuevo León, such training came to include some Kaibil instructors—because at least one trainee named Omar Hernández Bautista is known to have drowned while attempting a nocturnal swim across Las Lajas Dam with his weapon and knapsack under *kaibil* supervision in September 2002. And notwithstanding the slaying of Guzmán Decena in November 2002 and

arrest of Osiel Cárdenas in March 2003, the Zetas would begin recruiting even more unemployed Kaibiles as gunmen, when they were obliged to quickly augment their numbers as of autumn 2004 to counter a major offensive against the disputed border-city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. Unfettered and reveling in their dark reputation, the Guatemalans would perpetrate many cruel atrocities such as decapitations during the ensuing two years of savage urban warfare, soon emulated by fighters on both sides. Such vicious tactics were seemingly rewarded when the outnumbered Zetas prevailed in the war, opponents and collaborators being fearful of falling into their hands.

A glimpse of these Guatemalans' presence would be revealed in July 2005, when the U.S. Department of Homeland Security began receiving reports of at least 30 Kaibil instructors providing advanced weapons-training for Zeta recruits at a half-dozen training facilities scattered around Tamaulipas:

- one near the village of Abasolo, between Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria;
- another just north of Nuevo Laredo's airport;
- a third on a ranch just south of the border at McAllen, Texas; etc.

Another insight occurred when troops from the 91st Infantry Battalion arrested seven Guatemalans along Mexico's southern border in early September 2005, attempting to enter the country with a half-dozen machine guns and $100,000 in cash; four were later confirmed to be ex-Kaibiles, including an explosives expert. And a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report titled "Summary EH" and dated November 4, 2005, declared that:

> *As of June 2005, the Zetas were continuing efforts to recruit new members with military or law enforcement experience, and especially sought to attract former or current Mexican special-forces troops. The Mexican military's anti-corruption efforts apparently have stymied these efforts. However, Guatemalan military downsizing from 1996 through 2004 created a pool of special forces-trained candidates for the Zetas to draw on, to train new Zeta members or offset personnel shortfalls.*

That same year of 2005, a detained Zeta would add that his organization had recruited "former Guatemalan Kaibiles to work with the Zetas, and that the Kaibiles were procuring firearms and grenades from Guatemala on behalf of the Gulf Cartel."

On June 26, 2006, José Luis Santiago Vasconcellos—an assistant prosecutor with Mexico's organized-crime task force—confirmed that at least 100 Kaibiles were known to have joined the ranks of the Gulf Cartel. That same September, the Mexican Army arrested three former Guatemalan soldiers and five presumed Zetas in Aguililla, Michoacán, outfitted with 12 AK-47s and AR-15s; one 9mm pistol; 3,000 rounds of ammunition; three fragmentation-grenades; black fatigues; tactical vests; and ten Kevlar ballistic helmets. Even the ruthless Zeta leader himself, Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano, would employ Kaibiles as his personal security-detail: a Mexican Army reconnaissance report filed in 2007 described one of his many houses—at Plaza San Marcos Poniente 204, in Colonia Valle de San Ángel, Sector Francés in Monterrey's wealthy suburb of San Pedro Garza García—as being occupied by "two or three suspected Kaibiles and one unidentified person, apparently Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano." And late that same year of 2007, Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo"

Guzmán began hiring Kaibiles as well, for a paramilitary army several-thousand strong that he was planning to unleash in an all-out war against Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

Zeta Expansion into Guatemala (2007–2011)

Victorious in their defense of Nuevo Laredo by May 2007, numerous "demobilized" Zetas began seeking to extend their reach into Coahuila and other states for supplementary sources of income beyond extortions, kidnappings, and murders for hire, leaving their nominal Gulf Cartel bosses to manage the lucrative drug-traffic and arms-importation running through Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Teams of Zeta infiltrators known as *ventanas*—"windows," a euphemism for advance scouts who arrived covertly into a zone targeted for attack, buying up safe houses, warehouses, and other necessities, as well as bribing local officials in anticipation of a takeover attempt—were sent down the east coast of Mexico to begin securing the lengthy supply-lines radiating up from South America.

Guatemala being a staging-area for such traffic, Zeta operatives began appearing that same summer of 2007 in Cobán, capital of the Department of Alta Verapaz, even offering to allow local smugglers to buy in on the loads which they would soon be moving up from Colombia. These interlopers forged an alliance with the local crime-boss, Horst Walther "El Tigre" Overdick, and imposed a reign of terror throughout that impoverished region, with the assistance of an unknown number of outlaw Kaibiles. By 2008, pirate radio-stations in the area were openly broadcasting ads for ex-military men to "provide security to vehicles carrying goods to Mexico."

Guatemalan government officials discovered a Zeta training camp in March 2009 outside Quiché, a town in the central highlands near the Mexican border, with a hidden airstrip and a staggering cache of grenades, high-powered rifles, and ammunition. Next month, after a deadly shootout in Guatemala City, hundreds more grenades and ammunition boxes were found that had come from Guatemalan Army inventories—whether stolen, bought illegally through a corrupt third party, or obtained directly from the military remaining a mystery. And the Zetas continued recruiting: a DEA cable dated May 28, 2010 [SEARS NBR 6152], described how a confrontation along a Tamaulipas highway on May 19 had left four Zetas dead and a like number captured, plus their eight assault rifles and two vehicles—adding that these survivors included "subjects from Guatemala, [who] were members of the Fuerzas Especiales de Guatemala (Kaibiles)."

Border Deployment (2012)

A large contingent of Kaibiles were used to establish a perimeter in March 2012 around a "safe zone" within their Puerto Barrios compound in the Department of Izabal, so as to receive and secure an aerial transfer of 1,100 kilos of confiscated Colombian cocaine being flown in from the Caribbean coast by three Guatemalan Air Force Huey-II helicopters. Two months later, in response to unremitting Zeta brutalities in the rural highlands, the government of President Otto Pérez Molina [himself a Kaibil graduate] ordered the entire battalion of 300 special forces and 200 support troops to relocate in mid-May 2012 into the hamlet of El Subín, about 60 miles from the Mexican border. There, they were to conduct sweeps through the 180-square-mile municipality

of La Libertad, clearing it of Zeta and Sinaloa Cartel infiltrators.

See also: GAFE; GANFE; Infantería de Marina; Mano con Ojos.

Further Reading

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L

This is no feud between drug gangs; this is genocide.

—anonymous message of condolence left at a teenager's funeral, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (October 2010)

"La Barbie"—see "Valdez Villarreal, Édgar 'La Barbie'"

Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto "Z-3" (1974–2012). Young army corporal who joined the Gulf Cartel as a skilled gunman and assassin, eventually commanding its fearsome Zetas during their bloodiest years.

Birth and Early Military Service (1974–1997)

Born into the poor family of Gregorio Lazcano García and Amelia Lazcano Pérez in the municipality of Acatlán, Hidalgo, on December 25, 1974, he relocated with his parents to the state capital of Pachuca while still a child, the family settling in its Tezontle district. Young Heriberto's service-records indicate that he enlisted along with his childhood friend Raúl Lucio "El Lucky" Hernández Lechuga into the peacetime military at Pachuca's Campo Militar "General Pedro María Anaya" Número 18-A on June 5, 1991, as a 16-year-old infantryman with identification number B-9223601. [Less than a decade later, "El Lucky" Hernández would join his friend in their colleague Arturo Guzmán Decena's gang of criminal mercenaries, being assigned Zeta code-number Z-16.]

The teenage Heriberto distinguished himself sufficiently to be promoted to corporal as of July 1993, and after the Zapatista revolt erupted in Chiapas in January 1994, he was furthermore selected for training in one of the earliest six-month classes offered for new quick-strike Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales or "Special-Forces Airmobile Groups" (GAFEs), which the Army began creating as of 1995. The young soldier successfully completed "special armaments" and sharpshooting instruction, but it is highly unlikely that he ever received any additional international training as one of the 440 individuals taught during 1996 by the U.S. Army Seventh Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. No such detached service is mentioned in Lazcano's heavily-redacted service file, nor is his name recorded in the electronic database of visas issued to such trainees by the American Embassy in Mexico City. Usually such foreign postings were restricted to junior officers, and although Lazcano would often be described later in the popular press as a second lieutenant, he never rose above the rank of corporal.

Secondment as a Federal Judicial Agent (1997–1998)

Events would lead the 21-year-old special-forces commando into an unorthodox posting, inadvertently setting him on a criminal path. In the spring of 1997, many military personnel were temporarily transferred from their regular duties to fill in as

replacements in undermanned government agencies, Lazcano becoming one of 1,000 soldiers (650 of them newly-minted GAFEs) who were sent to the anti-narcotics prosecutorial branch known as the Fiscalía Especializada para Atención a los Delitos contra la Salud or "Specialized Prosecutor's Office Regarding Crimes against Public Health" (FEADS), to be deputized as federal *judiciales* or "judicial policemen." He was then sent north as one of 350 undercover GAFEs assigned to the Eighth Military Zone headquartered at Reynosa, being enrolled in FEADS as a field agent on June 15, 1997, with orders to infiltrate smuggling operations in Tamaulipecan border-towns. Years later, another participant—Mateo Díaz López—would describe his own FEADS field service as follows [PGR/SIEDO/UIEDCS/122/2006]:

> *I was commissioned to carry out intelligence work related to the activities being conducted by said suspects, such as whether they were spending in American dollars, or driving stolen cars, or setting up* tiendas *or "stores"* [i.e., street-level retail drug-outlets]*, or if they had any ongoing* jales *or "jobs," with the aim of establishing whether they were mixed up in anything bad and reporting on it.*

In keeping with standard PGR field-practice, each undercover operative was assigned a code number to maintain radio-contact with his superiors, consisting of the double-letter "ZZ" with successive numerals: ZZ-1, ZZ-2, etc. (Field commanders identified themselves by "XX" followed by numerals—XX-1, XX-2, etc.—while the state FEADS *subdelegado* or "assistant deputy prosecutor" was distinguished by the letters "YY.")

After four and a half months, Lazcano was removed from the FEADS rolls as of October 30, 1997, although he may have continued to participate in some ongoing covert investigations; at least, his Army file indicates that he was arrested in Reynosa on February 18, 1998, along with three other men while transporting 325 kilos of marijuana in a 1983 Chrysler Dodge van with U.S. license plates, and a brown 1994 Chevrolet Silverado SUV with no plates at all. Although all four men were detained, Lazcano was never charged, suggesting that he may have still enjoyed official immunity. Instead, the 23-year-old corporal was allowed to request his discharge from military service due to "family problems" on March 27, 1998, which was granted by April 15, 1998.

First Criminal Affiliations (1998–1999)

Although precise information remains sketchy, Lazcano was evidently among the small percentage of infiltrators who had been seduced by the generous pay and wealthy lifestyles afforded by the drug trade, when compared with the paltry salaries and impossibility of social advancement within the class-conscious Mexican Army. It is only known that he joined his comrade Arturo Guzmán Decena—who had deserted in September 1997—as personal bodyguards for Gilberto "El June" García Mena, the longtime Gulf Cartel boss for the sparsely-populated border municipality of Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas [opposite Roma, Texas]. A criminal since the 1970s, García Mena had been incarcerated in 1989 for two years in Topo Chico Prison in Monterrey, emerging to join with his brother Juan Anacleto and nephews to seize control over the smuggling-routes running through that territory.

El June was a wily veteran dealer who maintained a low profile with the federal and U.S. authorities and did not wish to be

caught crossing the border with a firearm (a felony that carried a much heftier prison-sentence in Mexico than drug possession); he therefore paid Guzmán and Lazcano handsomely to accompany him as body-guards. Soon, even officers from Tamaulipas' Policía Ministerial del Estado or "State Ministerial Police" (PME) at Miguel Alemán learned to shy away from any direct confrontations with this pair, who handled modern military-grade weaponry with deadly accuracy. In April 2001, a PME officer would recollect an earlier roadside encounter with the borderland drug-boss and his escorts:

> *A couple of years ago, I stopped him near Camargo. He was driving a* [Jeep] *Cherokee, firing off rounds. And then his* malandrines [delinquents] *aimed at me. In a very friendly fashion, he told me that he was "El June." And I just shook his hand, wishing him a good trip.*

Guzmán was next asked in February 1999 by Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, a claimant to the Gulf Cartel leadership in Matamoros, to gather about 20 gunmen and murder his rival Rolando "El Rolys [or Rolis or Role]" López Salinas. Backed by Lazcano, Guzmán's attack failed, as only the two of them were able to shoot their way into López Salinas's fortified residence on Décima Street in Miguel Alemán, before being pinned down by a counter-barrage. Several men were killed before Lazcano finally succeeded in hitting a propane gas-tank with a round, so that he and Guzmán could retreat during the resultant confusion [investigative file: PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS/111/2003].

Despite this disappointment, Guzmán and Lazcano had nonetheless acquitted themselves so well that they were soon being offered other contracts—which they performed with great alacrity. Together, they were implicated along with several other conspirators in a plot to murder corrupt Policía Judicial Federal (PJF) *comandante* Jaime Rajid Gutiérrez Arreola on March 21, 1999, in a dispute over money—which was settled violently around the kilometer 9 marker of the Reynosa-Camargo highway, near the *ejido* or "communal farm" at Cavazos, so that an arrest warrant for homicide and organized-crime affiliations was issued against both young toughs, although no policemen could be found brave enough to serve them.

More shootouts and murders ensued, due to the power struggle smoldering between Gulf Cartel factions (some 200 murders being registered in Tamaulipas alone that year of 1999), so that when Cárdenas' Colombian mistress, Andrea Posada Williamson, was interrogated by federal authorities in November 2000, she identified Lazcano by name as the security chief for his personal escorts. [Lazcano himself would later hire another ex-GAFE corporal named Pedro "El Perro" Vázquez Torres—who had enlisted in 1995, completed his special-forces training four years later, and quietly resigned from the military in March 2001—to serve as his own bodyguard.]

And surprisingly, according to a defector in the U.S. Witness Protection Program [file number: PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS/111/2003], Lazcano had also passed Cárdenas' crudely-named "*polla* test," a unique practical exam administered to promising subordinates recommended by cartel lieutenants such as "El Coss" Costilla, "El Meme" Vázquez, "Tony Tormenta," and Homero "El Majadero" Cárdenas Guillén. Given $3,000 to buy cocaine through two Colombian contacts at the port of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, each nominee was to sell their purchase at a profit in Mexico and reinvest any proceeds into more transactions, so as to discover

their business acumen. Lazcano proved to be particularly adept, soon regularly importing 18-kilo consignments from Cali, which would make him a very wealthy young man—eventually building at least four luxury residences in his hometown of Pachuca, one on Oyamel Street in Colonia del Tezontle, on a hilltop overlooking his old Army base 300 yards below. Others were located at:

- Privada Valle de Seco, Casa 4, Fraccionamiento Arboledas de San Javier
- Retorno 4, Camelias 122, fraccionamiento Paseo de Camelias
- Valle Imperial 150, fraccionamiento San Javier

In addition, he would have mansions at Vicente Rivapalacio 805, in Coatzacoalcos' Colonia Guadalupe Victoria, and Plaza San Marcos Poniente 204, Colonia Valle de San Ángel, Sector Francés in Monterrey's wealthy suburb of San Pedro Garza García. He also financed a major renovation of Pachuca's Nuestra Señora de San Juan de los Lagos Church on behalf of his mother, underwriting its annual festivities every February 2.

Gulf Cartel Soldier (February 2002–October 2004)

In February 2002, Osiel Cárdenas—having paid the required *derecho de piso* or "transit fee" to Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez, one of two gang-leaders controlling Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas—to smuggle two tons of cocaine through that border-city into Texas, dispatched this consignment from Matamoros in three armored SUVs with a Zeta escort commanded by Lazcano. Upon entering Nuevo Laredo to be chaperoned through that city by the *comandante* of its Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" detachment, Lazcano's convoy was instead confronted by this corrupt AFI officer with ten of his agents, who tried to seize his load.

Having previously detached more unseen Zetas to act as his convoy's scouts and outriders, Lazcano quickly summoned them by radio and captured the treacherous AFI squad in turn, radioing Matamoros for instructions—being told by "El Coss" Costilla to release his captives and retreat. Pursued out onto the highway by the freed AFI agents and a swarm of Nuevo Laredo's municipal police officers, many shots were exchanged before Lazcano's Zetas blocked the highway with an empty Ford Lobo pickup with tinted windows, which their pursuers shot to pieces from a safe distance while he and his men escaped.

Infuriated by El Chacho's double-dealing, Cárdenas ordered his 50–60 Zetas to infiltrate and launch a surprise retaliatory strike within Román García's own stronghold. They slipped into Nuevo Laredo undetected next month, quickly routing Román García's 300 Chacho street thugs through targeted nocturnal strikes, an informant later describing how during this campaign's opening-phase in March 2002, Guzmán and Lazcano personally "hunted" a band of four municipal policemen, abducting and torturing them to death before burning their remains in 200-liter steel drums. The deceitful Chacho was abducted from his Monterrey residence on May 13, 2002, his mutilated remains being found next day floating in the Río Bravo. [For greater details, see "Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003): Battle for Nuevo Laredo."]

Although too few in numbers to occupy Nuevo Laredo, the Zetas dominated the city and its nearby drug-routes, bringing rival trafficking to a halt. Guzmán was

unexpectedly killed in Matamoros on November 21, 2002, but the Zeta chain-of-command simply moved Z-2 up to become the new leader: Rogelio "El Kelín" González Pizaña—not a military veteran, so that the rank-and-file viewed his promotion with skepticism, preferring their fellow deserter Lazcano. Nevertheless, two months after the arrest of Osiel Cárdenas on March 14, 2003, Lazcano personally led a three-man hit squad which killed his competitor Edelio "El Yeyo" López Falcón in Guadalajara on May 6, 2003. And Lazcano was apparently the "brush-cut man wearing a Mao-collar shirt" seen by eyewitnesses, signaling for a black Jeep Cherokee to race up beside the Tijuana weekly *ZETA*'s editor Francisco J. Ortiz Franco's parked car on the afternoon of June 22, 2004, murdering him with four shots while his horrified 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son watched from the backseat.

Assuming Zeta Command (November 2004–February 2007)

Shortly after 9:00 p.m. on October 29, 2004, Rogelio (Z-2) González Pizaña arrived with his entourage for the reopening of La Covacha table-dancing bar in Matamoros. Informed soon afterward that traffic had stopped outside, a sign that a police raid was imminent, he slipped out its rear door to his chauffeur-driven car, tossing a fragmentation-grenade to help cover his escape when 30 PFP and AFI agents stormed into the building a few minutes later, engaging his 15 bodyguards in a firefight that left one agent dead and two wounded. But El Kelín's second grenade-toss exploded prematurely inside his Passat, killing his chauffeur and leaving the Zeta chief burned and injured, so that the agents secured him along with his henchmen without any further resistance.

As Z-3, next in line, the much more formidable Lazcano would assume Zeta leadership, leading them through some of the bloodiest and darkest years in their history. He would prove a fearsome field-commander during the battles to retain control over Nuevo Laredo during 2004–2007, as well as in leading Zeta squads on forays deep into enemy territory. [For greater details, see "Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009)."] Eventually, his victorious Zetas would be rewarded with Nuevo Laredo's *plaza*, but the 32-year-old ex-corporal was less successful as a leader in the absence of war, watching indifferently as many of his men—seeking to cash in on their power and frightening repute—indulged in cruel take-overs of legitimate businesses, extortions and kidnappings of civilians, and murders for hire, all the while recruiting hundreds of hardened criminals and sociopaths into their ranks as undisciplined new Zetas.

Narrow Escapes and Mounting Suspicion (March 2007–January 2010)

Once Osiel Cárdenas was extradited to the United States in January 2007, a truce was signed with the Sinaloans that same May, freeing the Zetas to seek their own autonomous drug-trafficking arrangement with the Colombians and embark on a territorial *expansión* as far south as Guatemala—circumventing their nominal Gulf Cartel bosses under "El Coss" Costilla. The latter apparently grew worried about the rising strength of their maverick Zetas, so that tensions between both groups mounted. As early as March 3, 2007, Lazcano had survived an apparent murder-attempt while attending a horseracing event at El Villarín Ranch in the municipality of Veracruz, a shootout suddenly erupting amid the excitement of a photo finish, which according to police intelligence was intended to cover for

a targeted assassination. But only Lazcano's trusted friend and host Efraín Teodoro (Z-14) Torres was killed, despite being himself shielded by 18 armed bodyguards—apparently shot in the back by one of these, who was seized and brutally beaten in an unsuccessful attempt to learn who was behind the plot, although suspicion fell on his Gulf Cartel–appointed second-in-command, Miguel (Z-40) Treviño Morales.

Then early next year, Lazcano's column of vehicles blundered into a military convoy near Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, but the head of his security detail, "El Perro" Vázquez, and his *sicarios* were able to shoot their way free. Late that same year, while attending a business meeting at El Atorón Ranch in the municipality of Santa María del Río, San Luis Potosí, Lazcano was almost arrested when the Policía Federal made a surprise raid at 6:00 a.m. on December 5, 2008. Although four of his personal retainers were captured—including his private secretary, Víctor Hugo "El Chiricuas" López Valdez, and his assistant, Pablo "Paguas" Gómez Solano—along with an impressive array of weaponry, Lazcano himself managed to flee into the surrounding underbrush and remain hidden for the next three days, despite lacking food or water. [Upon reemerging, Lazcano would have such a three-day survival course added to the training sessions taught at Zeta paramilitary camps; he would also order the murders of everyone who had known beforehand about his scheduled visit to El Atorón.]

Now more wary and distrustful than ever, Lazcano would tell incarcerated Osiel Cárdenas' deal-maker Juan Jesús Guerrero Chapa at a meeting between Gulf Cartel and Zeta leaders early next year that he had learned the imprisoned boss was bartering information about his subordinates with his DEA captors, so that Lazcano "had his suspicions that he was being set up"—especially since the raid on El Atorón Ranch had come so shortly after he had spoken on the phone with Gulf Cartel leader "El Coss" Costilla. If it was true that a betrayal was being contemplated and he were ever apprehended, Lazcano added ominously: "then an internal war would begin between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel, which the Gulf Cartel could not win."

The uncomfortable partnership between the Gulf Cartel and their ever-more ambitious Zetas took another downturn with the murder of 39-year-old Sergio "El Concorde" Peña Mendoza, personally handpicked by Lazcano and transferred north from Chiapas to occupy the vacated position of resident Zeta underboss in the Gulf Cartel's border-stronghold of Reynosa. It came as a surprise when Peña Mendoza, shortly after arriving, was challenged at a Policía Federal checkpoint on Décima Street in Las Fuentes neighborhood of Reynosa on March 14, 2009, and was captured after being chased in his Ford King Ranch pickup with Texas license-plates through the streets. An AK-47 found inside El Concorde's vehicle seemingly promised a lengthy prison sentence.

Falling-Out with the Gulf Cartel (January 2010–May 2012)

However, it was contrived for Peña Mendoza to be released from detention by the end of that same year—only to then be taken up again off a Reynosa street on January 18, 2010, this time abducted by a Gulf Cartel hit squad sent by Samuel (Metro 3) Flores Borrego. The latter closely interrogated this captive to determine where his loyalties might lie, and when El Concorde refused to abjure the Zetas, he was savagely beaten and finally executed on Flores Borrego's orders. Furious, Lazcano and Miguel

Ángel Treviño sent a *narcomensaje* to the Gulf Cartel leadership which read:

> *Send us the murderers of my friend, sons of whores. You have until January 25th* [2010] *to do so. If you don't cooperate, there shall be war.*

When the Gulf Cartel failed to respond, the Zetas covertly dispatched several hit-squads into their Reynosa stronghold on January 30, 2010, who abducted and murdered 16 *sicario* defenders in revenge. It is believed that the cartel may have responded to this action indirectly, by arranging a February 16, 2010, raid on Lazcano's home by a *marino* special-forces strike team, which surrounded the well-to-do Brisas del Valle neighborhood in northern Monclova—only to fail to locate his actual residence.

A full-blown Zeta offensive was consequently launched as of February 22, 2010, against the Gulf Cartel, whose members remained securely entrenched within their border strongholds of Reynosa and Matamoros—leaving their frontline detachments at Ciudad Mier, Miguel Alemán, and Camargo to bear the brunt of this Zeta onslaught over the next several months. Much to Lazcano's surprise, the Gulf Cartel proved more combative than expected, while Zeta strength had become diluted through dispersals and recruitments of worthless criminal replacements. His own nephew Roberto "El Bebo" Rivero Arana was captured by authorities in Tabasco at the end of March 2010, along with the corrupt public-security director for Ciudad del Carmen, as well as five AK-47s, five AR-15s, and other weaponry. Although the new Zeta Cartel would consolidate its grip over Piedras Negras during one brief but concentrated effort in April 2010, a war of attrition soon developed, with almost daily hit-and-run clashes in rural areas as rival *sicarios* attacked each other's drug-routes and also fought against the military's efforts to pacify this region. [For additional details, see "Narcotanques."]

Lazcano himself escaped an ambush by soldiers and federal policemen just north of his Monclova base on May 18, 2011, leaving his bodyguards engaged in a fierce shootout opposite its university and civic theater (which was damaged by the gunfire); then late that same month, Hipólito "El Contador" Bonilla Cespedes—one of his top financial operatives—was taken by the authorities. Stung by these personal losses, it is alleged that Lazcano angrily retaliated by orchestrating the assassination of Dr. Rodolfo Torre Cantú, highly-regarded PRI candidate and front-runner for the governorship of Tamaulipas in the upcoming state elections. Less than a week before the voters could go to the polls, his motorcade was ambushed while departing Soto la Marina for Torres to fly to Ciudad Victoria at 10:30 a.m. on June 28, 2010, by heavily-armed men in armored vehicles. The candidate and four members of his entourage were killed in a hail of bullets, and another four wounded, in the most brazen political assassination that Mexico had seen in many years.

Yet Lazcano was otherwise out of his element as a strategic commander, Zeta offensives with their limited numbers of reliable *sicarios* not rising above simple *calentando la plaza* tactics of disrupting a rival's territory through nuisance raids. They entrenched themselves defensively within their border-city of Piedras Negras in Chihuahua, as well as Ciudad Acuña farther west in Coahuila (beyond which lay the frontline Juárez Cartel base of Ojinaga), knowing that if his Zetas were to be pushed out of these two crucial border-crossings,

they would lose access to the U.S. market with fatal financial consequences. Already, his cash-poor *estacas* were living off robberies and extortions of vulnerable civilians within their dominion "to an obscene degree," it being rumored that some of these thugs—mainly mercenaries brought in from Central America, with no roots in the region—were no longer even getting paid.

Lazcano was almost captured again when federal authorities raided a birthday party that he threw for his girlfriend on April 23, 2012, in the *Centro Recreativo de la Sección 38 del Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Estado* or "Recreational Center for Section 38 of the National State Workers' Union" on Highway 57 just north of Monclova, but only the musical group Banda Jerez was still present when the agents burst in, along with numerous waiters and kitchen staff.

Zeta Cartel Fracture (June 2012)

Zeta unity began to crumble under this pressure, revealing the long-brewing differences between its dwindling number of ex-military men and thousands of criminal inductees. Early on the morning of June 1, 2012, *narcomantas* were hoisted in Jardín Independencia Park in the city of Zacatecas, as well as on a pedestrian walkway overlooking Félix U. Gómez Avenue in downtown Monterrey, complaining on Lazcano's behalf of the treachery of his ambitious civilian partner, Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño. Six days later, this message was repeated on the door of a truck parked outside the municipal offices in Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas, with 14 mutilated bodies festering inside. Then on June 12, 2012, Treviño's brother José was betrayed to the U.S. authorities, and arrested on a charge of money laundering.

Although disgruntled with his situation, Lazcano—who narrowly avoided capture in September 2012 while flying through the airport at Mérida, Yucatán, aboard a private Cessna—did not condone these *narcomantas'* challenging proclamation, nor did he act upon it. In fact, at 4:40 p.m. on October 3, 2012, José Treviño's son and Miguel Ángel Treviño's nephew engaged a heavily-armed patrol of the Coahuila State Police's *Grupo de Armas y Tácticas Especiales* or "Special Weapons and Tactics Group" (GATEs) in the Colonia Lomas del Norte district of Piedras Negras, who promptly riddled this young man's gray Jeep Grand Cherokee and killed him in a hail of bullets, along with four accompanying *sicarios*.

Enraged by his death, Lazcano instantly ordered the abduction and murder by way of retaliation of young José Eduardo "Lalo" Moreira (a nephew of Tamaulipas' sitting governor, Rubén Moreira Valdés), who was lured to a meeting three hours later in Ciudad Acuña, and his lifeless body discovered by ten o'clock that same evening. Next dawn, another *narcomensaje* appeared in Tamaulipas' state capital, reading *sobrino por sobrino* or "nephew for nephew." This cruel slaying of an innocent young man would galvanize the federal government into rushing additional troops, federal police officers, and investigators into the state to hunt for its perpetrator.

Death (October 2012)

Whether coincidence or not, a mere four days afterward a patrol of crack *marino* special-forces—acting on anonymous complaints which had supposedly been phoned in about armed men seen roaming around a rural baseball game near Sabinas in the lawless municipality of Progreso, Coahuila [about 80 miles west of the Texas border

near Laredo]—unexpectedly arrived to investigate at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 7, 2012. This semi-abandoned town had had no municipal police force since January 2012 because local officers had refused to submit to the background checks and vetting procedures required; the area around its baseball field was also known as one of only two spots in town with reliable cellphone reception.

As the *marinos* approached, someone tossed grenades from a moving vehicle, slightly wounding one special-forces member so that this detachment shot back. Lazcano's driver, Alberto Rodríguez, died in the fleeing vehicle, which crashed while the Zeta leader jumped out with an AR-15 fitted with a grenade launcher, trying to shoot his way clear before falling as well some 300 yards away. [Another pair of assault rifles, grenades, and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher would later be recovered from his vehicle.]

Unaware of whom they had killed and in the absence of any *Servicio Médico Forense* or "Forensic Medical Service" (SEMEFO) facility in the area, the marines conveyed Lazcano's body to Progreso's García funeral home by 6:00 p.m., where it was photographed and fingerprinted before the naval strike-team departed. Early next morning, October 8, 2012, an armed band of Lazcano's Zeta loyalists forced their way inside to reclaim his corpse and that of his driver. It was noted that after El Lazca's death, the number of gruesome massacres, dismemberments, and decapitations declined significantly throughout the region.

See also: FEADS; GAFE; Gulf Cartel; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003); Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009); Zeta Cartel (2010–2014).

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Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos (1972–Present).

"Federal Firearms and Explosives Law" (LFAFE), a legislative act which restricts gun ownership in Mexico—and provides prosecutors with an effective tool for detaining cartel *sicarios* and other armed criminals.

Due to a proliferation of firearms that began accumulating in postwar Mexico from a variety of international sources, the administration of President Luis Echeverría passed this all-encompassing law on December 29, 1971, which went into effect upon being promulgated in the *Diario oficial* on January 11, 1972. This act defined the rights and responsibilities inherent to ownership of light hunting-rifles, shotguns, and pistols permitted to rural residents, sportsmen, collectors, and private

individuals, as well as the .38-caliber sidearms employed by security firms, bank guards, etc. It also regulated the proper storage and usage of explosives for commercial purposes such as blasting, demolitions, and the like. Various amendments and updates have been since added.

Article 10 allows for possession of firearms in private homes "for their security and legitimate defense, with the exception of those prohibited by federal law and those reserved for the exclusive use of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard." The broad purpose of this article is to provide for some measure of self-defense within the confines of one's own home, under the following conditions:

- The owner must be a Mexican citizen, or a foreigner with legal residency status.
- The firearm must be of small caliber as specified by the regulations in Article 11.
- The weapon must be registered with the Army and a bond posted.
- This firearm is not to be carried outside the home.

Article 11 lists the few small-caliber firearms that can legally be registered, while specifically reserving any higher-powered weaponry "for the exclusive use" of the armed forces. Prohibited firearms start with .357 Magnum or larger-caliber handguns; 9mm semiautomatics; .223 or .30-caliber, or 7.62mm rifles or carbines; all submachine guns; etc., the mere possession of which (or their ammunition) is punishable with prison terms ranging from three months to three years, plus fines summing up to a maximum of 360 days of the guilty party's net income, as laid out in Articles 160–163 of the Federal Penal Code.

See also: AK-47 Assault Rifle; AR-15 Rifle; Barrett .50-Caliber Long-Range Rifle; Gulf Cartel: Arms Importation; Mossberg Shotgun.

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"Lord of the Skies"—see Carrillo Fuentes, Amado

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No, here you can't just arrest anyone. From above, they'll bust your balls to let them go: the comandante orders it, the general orders it. And I didn't want to wake up shot full of holes.

—anonymous officer of the Tamaulipas State Ministerial Police (April 2001)

Mano con Ojos (2010–2011). "Hand with Eyes," lurid name for a small self-styled "cartel" that operated for a year in the State of Mexico, near the national capital.

It is said that this short-lived organization was initially formed in an Acapulco hotel on May 15, 2010, at a meeting of fugitive bosses from the Beltrán Leyva Organization, who had been left leaderless by the recent death of their ferocious boss Arturo Beltrán and eruption of bitter cartel infighting. The ex-Federal Policeman Eznel Cortés Jiménez and naval deserter Óscar Oswaldo "El Compayito" García Montoya proposed the creation of a new subsidiary syndicate in the Valley of Mexico, intending to import and distribute cocaine from the lone Colombian source remaining after the arrest of Gerardo "El Indio" Álvarez Vázquez on April 22, 2010 (whom El Compayito had served as head of security and *sicario* commander).

Cortés and Garcia Montoya's plan was to hide large cocaine consignments in stash houses in Morelos, where they could be cut and prepped with little chance of a raid, so as to then be smuggled through distribution hubs in the State of Mexico for eventual sale in the vast Mexico City market, where other rival gangs were known to already be operating. At first, "El Compayito" García was able to make inroads, his mysterious gang seemingly appearing out of nowhere and quickly establishing a foothold in the national capital's southern quarter, its supply-source unknown. However, opposition soon appeared, so that a few headless corpses began to appear in the municipality of Naucalpan northwest of Mexico City as of February 10, 2011, with threatening "narco-messages" signed *Mano con Ojos*. However, García Montoya was arrested himself on August 11, 2011, when it was revealed that his cell's oddly-menacing name was simply a contraction of his other moniker—*La Mano* or "The Hand"—along with the nickname of his Mexico City partner, Felipe Jesús "El Ojos" Pérez.

García's bodyguard and driver, Juan José "El Casas" Rodríguez Rodríguez, assumed command over the gang's 50 members, leaving a pair of decapitated bodies in a pickup at the intersection of the capital's Anillo Periférico and Conscripto Street on October 3, 2011, with a message still signed as "Mano con Ojos." But the so-called Cártel del Centro (another surviving Beltrán-Leyva fragment under Adrián "El H" or "El Hongo" Ramírez Soria) then tried to take over Garcia Montoya's street outlets, resulting in nasty fighting against "El Ojos" Pérez that led to at least 29 more murders and

beheadings in the State of Mexico and another ten in Mexico City by December 2011—still attributed in the press to Mano con Ojos, although only "El Ojos" Pérez actually remained free. He would manage his drug traffic from his Tláhuac stronghold in the southern part of Mexico City, his influence extending as far as Milpa Alta, Xochimilco, and Iztapalapa, until *marino* special-forces stormed his headquarters, arresting his subordinates and impounding his warehouses on July 20, 2017.

See also: Beheadings; Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Decline and Dissolution.

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Mantas—see "Narcomantas or narcomensajes"

Marinos—see "Infantería de Marina"

Mass Graves—see "Body Disposals"

Mata Zetas or Matazetas (2005–2015). "Zeta Killers," originally a shadowy underworld hit-squad that set about targeting Zetas, at a time when they were the most feared drug-gang in Mexico.

First Video Appearance (May 2005)

The Mata Zetas arose from an intense personal hatred held by Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal, leader of Los Negros paramilitary force of the Beltrán-Leyva Organization (itself a Sinaloa Cartel subsidiary), whose rancor against the Gulf Cartel's ex-Army mercenaries had been born in the first few months of 2005, during the protracted struggle for control over the border-city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. Bitterly resentful after younger brother Armando Valdez had been captured and brutally executed by Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales, despite La Barbie's pleas for clemency, he got his chance for revenge when a four-man Zeta *destacamento de seguridad* or "security detail" was sent during the first week of May 2005 to abduct Sinaloa Cartel members from their regional base at Acapulco—as well as another five-man team to do the same at Zihuatanejo. Pretending to be vacationers, these undercover Zeta infiltrators soon grew alarmed at realizing how completely the Sinaloans controlled the state and municipal police in Acapulco, and most especially the Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) officers in that resort city [2005 population: 616,390]—any of whom would gladly hand them over to their enemies if caught trespassing.

The leader of the four Zetas in Acapulco—Juan Miguel "El Peterete" Vizcarra, a former Army soldier—in fact received a phoned warning at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, May 15, 2005, that the five-man Zihuatanejo team had been captured in a nightclub that previous night and Acapulco's cartel-bosses already alerted. When Vizcarra and his wife and two-year-old stepdaughter emerged from their hotel into Acapulco's main square to buy some phone

cards, so as to desperately call his sister and request wired funds to help them flee, they were swept up within minutes by a dozen heavily-armed masked gunmen (one bearing the initials "AFI" on his dark uniform), who leaped from three SUVs with tinted windows—this abduction occurring within plain sight of a nearby municipal police station.

The captives were driven to a large mansion surrounded by an electrified fence in the wealthy Costa Azul suburb and confined in different bedrooms upstairs, along with Vizcarra's three fellow Zetas. Next morning, May 16, 2005, La Barbie appeared and interrogated the four kneeling *sicarios*, while recording their ordeal on video. They confessed details about their cruel work as Gulf Cartel hit-men, telling lurid stories about abducting rivals, killing reporters, burying people's daughters, and other such barbarities. After they concluded their narratives, La Barbie's gun appeared from off-camera and shot Vizcarra in the left temple, and his three terrified companions' deaths were also recorded. Valdez subsequently posted this graphic video on YouTube—attributing it to a shadowy new group provocatively called the Mata Zetas—and later sent a copy to *The Dallas Morning News* and other media outlets for wider circulation, intending to expose and discredit the Zetas' bestial conduct.

Yet Vizcarra's wife was very well treated, her little girl receiving a bowl of cereal with a banana for breakfast, and then allowed to play in the mansion's pool. Later on that same day, La Barbie had both mother and daughter driven unharmed to Acapulco's bus terminal for release, personally giving them 1,000 pesos to pay their fares and expenses out of town. And Valdez remained so chillingly unconcerned about being identified as the four Zetas' executioner, that he handed Vizcarra's wife a picture of himself to show to any Zetas who might inquire as to their hit-squad's fate.

Grupo Matazetas in the War for Acapulco (August 2005–September 2006)

Zeta retaliation came when another team struck on August 2, 2005, murdering Julio Carlos López Soto, assistant director of Guerrero's state *Policía Investigadora Ministerial* or "Ministerial Investigative Police" (PIM). Three days later, these attackers released his bodyguard—beaten but otherwise unharmed—who relayed a message directly from Gulf Cartel leader Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén to a press conference from his hospital bed: "They told me to tell you (the media) that they are already here in Guerrero, with 120 Zeta fighting-men from Tamaulipas; and send along greetings from Mr. Goyo Sauceda, and long live Tamaulipas!" [Gregorio "El Goyo" Sauceda Gamboa being overall commander of the Gulf Cartel *sicarios*.] Hit-and-run attacks began against Sinaloan dealers, stash houses, shipments, and auxiliaries throughout this resort city and its district, until its *plaza* chief, Carlos Esteban Landeros Sánchez, was slain in February 2006.

Arturo Beltrán thereupon instructed La Barbie to assume command over Acapulco's *plaza* and raise a new paramilitary force to respond in kind, dubbed Los Pelones. The bitter personal animosity which Valdez felt toward Miguel (Z-40) Treviño and his Zetas made the subsequent fighting more inhumane than usual, leading to more appearances by the Mata Zetas—referring to themselves as the *Cártel de Jalisco Grupo Matazetas* or "Jalisco Cartel, Mata

Zetas Group" in a video posted in early December 2005, showing more bound Zetas kneeling before armed masked groups, confessing their crimes before being callously executed.

Transitory Resurrection (June 2009)

The name "Mata Zetas" would be revived during the summer of 2009 by Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal, the Sinaloa Cartel's third-ranking leader and regional boss for Jalisco, as cover for his counterattacks against territorial encroachments being made into that state by the Zetas—portraying his retaliation as a "public service" against their cruelties. Coronel consequently raised and dispatched a heavily-armed clandestine counter-unit, which left three men's bodies—handcuffed and with plastic bags tied over their heads, the apparent cause of their deaths through suffocation—inside a gray-colored Jeep Liberty SUV in a residential neighborhood of Cancún, Quintana Roo, on June 19, 2009. Placed atop their remains was a cardboard sign bearing a handwritten message: "We are the new Mata Zetas Group, and we are against kidnappings and extortions, and we will fight them in all the states for a cleaner Mexico."

This trio had last been seen alive online, kneeling before a group of masked gunmen, and in a follow-up phone call to SIEDO headquarters on July 1, 2009, an unidentified man said that more Zetas were going to be "abducted and eliminated" from Cancún and Veracruz. No further actions ensued, however, as Coronel became distracted that same autumn of 2009 by a power struggle within the subordinate Milenio Cartel and was killed in a shootout against military-intelligence officers at one of his luxury Guadalajara residences on July 29, 2010.

Jalisco Nueva Generación Revival (Summer 2011–Spring 2012)

The title of "Mata Zetas" was claimed for a third time by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, after having united with the Sinaloa Cartel to defeat the Knights Templar and Zetas in western Mexico. Pressing rapidly eastward toward the Gulf, they released a video on July 27, 2011, in which a masked spokesman surrounded by 30 black-uniformed *sicarios* announced: "to the people of Veracruz, that we are already here, and to the entire Mexican Republic, that we are the Mata Zetas group." Declaring themselves to be fighting for "the peace and safety of all," he asked citizens to denounce any known Zetas to "the Army or Navy" rather than to the corrupt police, while "as far as we are concerned, we shall do things our way: the proof being that we have killed every Zeta that we have caught." He concluded with the comment: "Drug-trafficking might not end, but it is possible to turn it toward peace, tranquility, and the future of our children."

Such reassuring sentiments were belied a couple of months later, when several pick-ups filled with heavily-armed masked men appeared escorting a pair of flatbed trucks through rush-hour traffic along Manuel Ávila Camacho Boulevard in Boca del Río, a suburb of the city of Veracruz, around 5:00 p.m. on September 20, 2011. Within plain view of hundreds of onlookers, they halted opposite the Plaza Américas commercial complex and began tossing dead bodies onto the pavement, before hanging a crudely-written banner nearby and driving away, leaving behind the flatbeds—loaded with a total of 23 male and 12 female murder victims. The narco-message on the killers' banner read: "This will happen to all the Zeta-s— who stay in Veracruz, this *plaza* now has a new owner." The State

Attorney-General's Office confirmed that same evening that most of the dead had been identified as Zeta members, all having records for such major felonies as kidnappings, murders, and drug trafficking [although the attorney-general's suspiciously fast assessment would later be dismissed as a planted story].

Veracruz had been a Zeta stronghold since the administration of the previous PRI governor, Fidel Herrera Beltrán, but their grip was now shaken by repeated Army strikes, and attacks on all sides by such longtime adversaries as the Gulf and Sinaloa Cartels. Public fears that a new wave of violence was about to engulf the region were addressed when a video was posted online four days later, in which five masked men apologized on behalf of their group "if by our actions, we offended society, the people of Mexico, and federal entities . . . Our intention was to let the people of Veracruz know that this scourge of society [the Zetas] are not invincible" and would soon be driven out of "the Port of Veracruz, Boca del Río, Cardel, Xalapa, Poza Rica, Tuxpan, Pánuco, Córdova, Orizaba, Perote, San Andrés Tuxtla, Martínez de la Torre, Minatitlán, Acayucan, Alvarado, Coatzacoalcos, and other municipalities in this state." The message concluded by asking the public:

> *. . . to trust in us, the Mata Zetas, who do not extort, kidnap, and shall never touch personal or national wealth; who respect the federal, state, and municipal executive-powers in their struggle against organized crime, and understand their position of non-negotiation, which obliges us to act clandestinely, yet always in benefit of the people of Mexico.*

Naval special-forces nevertheless paraded eight captured members of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel before news cameras on October 7, 2011, charging them as perpetrators of the grotesque Boca del Río atrocity (as well as hiding 32 additional cadavers in three different residences around the city of Veracruz). Another navy *comando* or "squad" swept through Colonia Infonavit in the Veracruz-Boca del Río district in mid-April 2012, arresting what they described as the cartel's *jefe de sicarios Matazetas* or "Mata Zeta *sicarios* chief," 29-year-old Marco Antonio "El Canelo" Reyes Leal, whose detention in turn allowed the *marinos* to locate the *plaza* boss for that port-city in its Colonia Nueva Era, plus the financial boss—23-year-old Jorge Luis Feria Hernández—in Colonia Primero de Mayo.

See also: Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI); Beltrán-Leyva Organization; *Plaza*; Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie."

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Methamphetamines. A potent, highly-addictive stimulant manufactured in clandestine Mexican labs, proving a major source of revenue for the Sinaloa Cartel.

Its parent drug—amphetamine—was originally discovered in 1893, a white, odorless, bitter-tasting crystalline powder easily

soluble in water or alcohol, used in nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers. "Methamphetamine" refers to a specific chemical derivative developed during the early 20th century—the racemic free-base—which is rarely prescribed medically because of concerns involving human neurotoxicity and potential addiction, as it causes much greater dosages to reach the brain, with longer-lasting and eventually more harmful effects on the central nervous system. This latter alkaloid is nevertheless taken in pills as a recreational drug, an aphrodisiac, or euphoriant commonly called meth, ice, crystal, ecstasy, etc.

Early Mexican Production (1993–2006)

During the mid-1980s, the youthful auto mechanic José de Jesús "Chuy" Amezcua Contreras was asked by some American clients in San Diego, California, whether he could bring in ephedrine from Mexico (where this key ingredient had not yet been banned), giving him $50,000 to buy them 200 kilos' worth and smuggle it in from Tijuana. Realizing its profitability, Jesús Amezcua started production in his native state of Jalisco, traveling to India by 1993 to begin placing large orders for bulk purchases of inexpensive ephedrine. The resultant proceeds permitted the Amezcua brothers to acquire or control more clandestine labs and front companies in Baja California, Michoacán, Aguascalientes, Nuevo León, and the Federal District, earning the family the sobriquet *Reyes del Éxtasis* or "Kings of Ecstasy." [For greater details, see "Colima Cartel."]

In February 2003, their syndicate gained a valuable new supplier of bulk ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine: an immigrant from Shanghai named Zhenli Ye Gon, who had obtained his Mexican citizenship that previous year. By July 2005, he would have imported 33.8 tons of raw materials, to be transported through the Tierra Caliente region into large, well-hidden "mega-labs" around Tepalcaltepec, Jalisco. But having profited richly from this business, the Amezcuas then sold off most of their facilities to their Milenio Cartel friends, who were soon obliged to surrender them to Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal, the Sinaloa Cartel regional underboss at Guadalajara [see "Milenio Cartel: Subordination and Dissolution"].

Sinaloa Cartel Dominance (2007–Present)

Manufacturing methamphetamine pills in their own labs meant that the Sinaloans would reap the lion's share of any profits, which were soon being shipped to Europe and Asia as well, becoming a significant moneymaking component of their organization—so much so that the incarcerated Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán evidently arranged for a separate meth-division called the *Cártel del Pacífico* to be created by his longtime partner Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, to eventually be inherited by his young sons Iván Archivaldo and Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar. Competing gangs such as the Mazatlecos and Jalisco New Generation Cartel were also attracted to this lucrative traffic, so that clashes spread through the municipalities of Choix, Los Mochis, Guasave, Guamúchil, and Mazatlán, resulting in numerous deaths and abductions as both sides sought to monopolize the production of pills.

A sweep by *marino* special-forces in August 2018 discovered a huge Sinaloan jungle meth-lab concealed near the hamlet of Alcoyonqui in the mountains outside Culiacán, burning about 50 tons of methamphetamines worth some $5 billion, plus four more labs near Cosalá with another 26

tons. Still, lightweight bags of these high-value pills remained in circulation, a single 3,800-pound Sinaloan shipment intercepted at the Los Angeles-Long Beach port-complex in mid-January 2019 having an estimated street value of $900 million.

See also: Colima Cartel; Ephedrine Intercept.

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Milenio Cartel (1990–2010).

Second phase in this organization's evolution, when the humble Valencia family Cártel de los Aguacates in Michoacán became transformed—thanks to lucrative Colombian cocaine deals—into the wealthy and multistate Milenio Cartel, before eventually dissolving into today's Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel.

Avocados Cartel Transformation Cartel (1990–2001)

The Valencias' original Avocados Cartel had profited steadily throughout the 1980s from trafficking in marijuana and low-grade heroin, but more importantly, had forged a smuggling network that radiated up the Pacific coast into California and included:

- a business association with the strategically-placed Tijuana Cartel;
- scores of law-enforcement and customs collaborators on Valencia payrolls; plus
- fleets of boats and airplanes to provide multiple supplementary means for moving their bulk cargoes.

After the unexpected arrest in April 1989 of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, *padrino* or "godfather" of Mexico's criminal underworld, the Valencias would furthermore open up a second access-point into the American market by reaching an accommodation with the Juárez Cartel of Amado Carrillo Fuentes. [For a more complete account of the Avocado Cartel's early years, see "Aguacates, Cártel de los."]

However, it would be the Valencias' long-established trafficking routes, contacts, and experience that would persuade the Colombian cartels—which were seeking alternate means for slipping cocaine into the United States—to sign an arrangement around 1990 between Armando Valencia and Fabio Ochoa of the Medellín Cartel to trans-ship loads for a fixed fee. The profits accrued from this rich new stream—when compared with the relatively low returns on Mexican marijuana and low-grade heroin—would multiply the Valencias' income exponentially and allow them to spread out from their native Michoacán into the adjoining Pacific states of Jalisco, Colima, and Nayarit during the early 1990s, as well as add methamphetamines obtained from the Amezcua Contreras brothers to their inventory of drugs.

Details about the inner workings of the Valencias' syndicate (which would be

renamed the *milenio* or "Millennium" Cartel as the year 2000 drew near) would remain sketchy, as few authorities had ever bothered to investigate this heretofore low-profile group in its backwater setting, when much more spectacular events were unfolding along Mexico's northern border. Superficially, the Valencia family owned and operated large packing-plants for avocado and fruit exports, trucking companies, and auto-repair shops, as well as carwashes and cockfight pits throughout the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacán, living mostly around the city of Uruapan. Although discreet with his wealth, Armando Valencia was known to enjoy *parejera en carriles* horseracing, having a regulation course and grandstand on his La Tregua Ranch on the Carápan Playa Azul Highway 37 between Uruapan and Capácuaro, while Luis Valencia bred thousands of fighting roosters on his Cheranguerán properties.

Exposure (1998–2001)

However, the 1998 arrest of Guillermo Moreno Ríos—the Valencias' primary contact with their Colombian suppliers—would spark a flurry of government interest, which proved revealing. According to an intelligence report compiled that same year by the Mexican Army [file number V-1 1996–1998], the growing Cártel del Milenio was by then:

- receiving loads of Colombian cocaine dropped into the sea off the sparsely-populated and impoverished coastline around Buena Vista and Aquila, to be retrieved by boats and concealed in non-descript buildings and warehouses ashore until they could be
- trans-shipped through Morelia and Uruapan, usually concealed aboard the 18-ton commercial Kenworth Torton tractor-trailers that every week brought legal cargoes of the Valencias' bananas from Coahuayana, Chiapas, for which reason the Milenio leadership
- paid the influential State Senator José Antonio García Torres to be their "fixer" in the capital city of Morelia, as well as act on behalf of their Tijuana Cartel partners, to the point of even offering to finance García Torres' electoral bid for governor "in return for being left alone," as well as
- having paid substantial bribes to the previous PRI state Governor Victor Manuel Tinoco Rubi to turn a blind eye as they laundered millions in drug profits by buying up lands, ranches, and legitimate businesses, without any questions being raised by tax auditors.

The *milenios* furthermore maintained their friendly working-relationship with the Amezcua Contreras brothers of neighboring Colima, making bulk purchases of their amphetamines and shipping these out through Apatzingán. [Eventually, the Valencias would also buy up many of the Colima Cartel's hidden jungle mega-labs, as that organization faded out of the trade.]

As a result of these revelations, a joint task-force codenamed Operación "Milenio" involving Mexico, the United States, and Colombia was launched on October 13, 1999, linking the connections between Luis Valencia and Fabio Ochoa's drug-trafficking organizations. The American government reclassified the Milenio Cartel as one of the "most violent and powerful" syndicates in Mexico, responsible for smuggling one-third of all the cocaine consumed in the United States—a staggering 700–800 tons of cocaine every year, according to DEA estimates, such trans-shipments netting a profit of $20–25 million. Next month,

five federal prosecutors led by Óscar Pompa Plaza and backed by 100 GAFEs deputized as FEADS field-agents suddenly appeared in Uruapan in early November 1999 to question Luis and Armando Valencia and their confederates. Unfortunately, the list of suspects supplied by the American authorities failed to include full and proper names, rendering it useless in a district where more than 600 men had names that included some variant of Luis, Armando, and Fernando Valencia. Investigators tried to narrow down their search by subpoenaing the regional register of properties on November 8, 1999, noting that Armando Valencia Cornelio held title to 53 deeds [file number: 1593/MPFEADS/99], yet this was insufficient grounds to press charges.

The Valencia leadership therefore weathered this official inquiry, enduring nothing more than the detentions of about 40 minor members, so that another Army intelligence-report compiled in 2001would identify the principal organizations still moving narcotics through Michoacán as the:

- Tijuana Cartel, which was shipping cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamines through a network of towns that included Lázaro Cárdenas, Coahuayana, Aquila, Aguililla, Coalcomán, Arteaga, and Tumbiscatío;
- Mafia Mexicana or "Eme," whose heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine routes ran through Tingüindín, Tocumbo, Los Reyes, Sahuayo, Jiquilpan, Purépero, Peribán, and La Piedad;
- Juárez Cartel, which controlled Zitácuaro, Huetamo, Jungapeo, Tiquicheo, Tuzantla, Benito Juárez, and Susupuato [while furthermore disputing the state capital of Morelia against the encroaching Gulf Cartel];
- Sinaloa Cartel, which operated through Carácuaro, Tacámbaro, Nocupétaro, Villa Madero, Acuitzio, and Turicato; plus the merging
- Milenio and Colima Cartels, whose territory encompassed Apatzingán, Taretan, Tepalcatepec, Ario de Rosales, La Huacana, Buenavista, Tancítaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, and Nuevo Urecho.

The Mexican authorities learned even more about the Valencias' once-secretive operations after a second Colombian contact, Gino Brunetti, was arrested at Cancún's international airport in July 2001 and turned state's evidence—describing the Milenio Cartel to his interrogators as "the most important and powerful importers of drugs into the United States."

Challenges, Defeats, and Retreat (2002–2005)

The Milenios' rising status and wealth had not only brought stricter scrutiny, but also weightier problems. Late that same year of 2001, a part-time collaborator named Carlos Alberto "El Tísico" Rosales Mendoza—who had previously had drug dealings with Armando, Luis, and Ventura Valencia—entered into a cocaine transaction with Armando Valencia that ended badly, leading to a quarrel (reputedly exacerbated by a bitter feud over a woman). A resentful Rosales Mendoza had spitefully offered his services that winter to the expansionistic Gulf Cartel of Tamaulipas, who welcomed him and allegedly even assigned three of their best *sicarios* to serve as his personal bodyguards. The aggrieved Rosales moreover began contacting other disgruntled bosses in Michoacán such as Jesús "El Chango" Méndez, Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno, and Servando "La Tuta" Gómez, forging friendships.

Hostilities commenced when a hit squad provided by the Gulf Cartel assassinated Jorge Caballero Valencia, a nephew of Armando Valencia, while he was walking through a mall parking-lot in Morelia along with two other victims on February 17, 2002. Murders and counter-murders quickly ensued, but were interrupted by a major event along the northern border (where the Milenios had become significant exporters through the smuggling hub of Nuevo Laredo, paying $130,000 bribes to ship through 300-kilo consignments of cocaine): their local agent Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez attempted to treacherously seize a preapproved shipment of two tons of cocaine being sent through that city in February 2002 by Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, and the latter retaliated next month by unleashing his lethal new paramilitary company Los Zetas in a surprise attack.

Despite outnumbering these 50 or 60 Army deserters, El Chacho's 300 thugs were quickly routed, so that Armando Valencia was mentioned in DEA reports as having shifted his headquarters into Guadalajara, Jalisco, by late March 2002, so as to help defend his cartel's interests at the border-crossing. Yet the Zetas killed El Chacho by mid-May 2002, imposing Gulf Cartel dominance over Nuevo Laredo and its adjacent drug-corridors, although they were too few in number to occupy a city of 308,000 inhabitants. The Milenios tried to exert pressure from a distance, while an uneasy truce simmered in that city, occasionally punctuated by violent outbursts; but the occupiers' grip did not slacken even after Zeta leader Arturo (Z-1) Guzmán was killed by the Army in Matamoros on November 21, 2002, or Osiel Cárdenas was arrested on March 14, 2003.

Shortly thereafter, Armando Valencia decided to accept a proposal from a Texas-born trafficker who had earlier been exiled from Nuevo Laredo and become affiliated with the Sinaloa Cartel—Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal—to spearhead a low-key offensive aimed at retaking that disputed city while its defenders were distracted. Valencia accordingly began providing financial support, giving his undercover local representative $150,000 to rent "15 or 20 [furnished] residences in Nuevo Laredo, because they are going to fight for its *plaza*, and intended to insert 200 men under his command." Hearing of this design, a Zeta *comando* or "squad" penetrated deep into the Milenio heartland and murdered six Valencia family-members in the municipality of Los Reyes, Michoacán, on July 12, 2003—soon followed by three more. Alarmed by such incursions far into their territory, other relatives began fleeing into Jalisco from fear of the unprecedented Zeta terror-tactic of attacking civilian noncombatants.

Armando Valencia himself was then spotted at noon on Friday, August 15, 2003, entering a Guadalajara restaurant by scouts from the Army's Eighth *Fuerzas Especiales* or "Special Forces" (GAFE) Battalion—allegedly acting on a tip from the vindictive Rosales Mendoza, the Gulf Cartel ally. Refraining from taking any action in the crowded eatery, the GAFEs followed the Milenio boss and his retinue to a bar in the municipality of Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, just southeast of Jalisco's state-capital, where Valencia was arrested without resistance at 4:00 p.m. along with seven companions who included Eloy Treviño García, a turncoat state Policía Ministerial officer who had been commanding the Valencias' frontline *sicarios* around Nuevo Laredo; Treviño García's top lieutenants in the vicinity of Reynosa; plus Arturo "El Flaco" Peña Muñoz, who managed *milenio*

drug shipments through Monterrey, Nuevo León. All were flown out that same day aboard a Mexican Air Force plane to be incarcerated.

[Not surprisingly, "El Flaco" Peña's million-dollar mansion in Ciudad Miguel Alemán was set ablaze by arsonists and burned to the ground that following night, August 16, 2003. Before dawn on Monday, August 18, a "group of armed men" also broke into an auto dealership in Nuevo Laredo reputedly owned by another detainee, Sergio "King Kong" Villarreal Aparicio, leaving its night-watchman handcuffed after sprinkling combustibles and setting it afire. This same group visited like treatments on residences allegedly owned by two other detainees that same Monday: Lucio "El Sol" Martínez Manríquez's property at 7519 Pino Suárez Street at 11:30 a.m., and Javier "El Mamado" Martínez's property at 36 Ocampo Street by 3:30 p.m. Armando Valencia's name would be belatedly added nine months later among the four major Mexican crime-bosses newly listed under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act in Washington, D.C. on June 1, 2004.]

Luis Valencia had in the meantime succeeded his cousin Armando as cartel leader, seconded by Óscar Orlando "El Lobo" Nava Valencia and Salvador "El Chava Lentes" Revueltas Ureña as his top lieutenants. Despite being rattled by the loss of their founder and longtime figurehead, the surviving Millennium leaders decided to continue supporting "La Barbie" Valdez's stealthy infiltration of Nuevo Laredo during the fall of 2003. However, even with the direct participation of fearsome Sinaloa Cartel enforcer Arturo Beltrán Leyva and backing from his superior Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, plus the Juárez Cartel of Vicente "El Viceroy" Carrillo, it would take the remainder of that year to fully man the clandestine hideouts rented throughout Nuevo Laredo with 200 ex-policemen and hired Sinaloa gunmen, in teams of 10 to 15 *sicarios* apiece. And by February 2004, a PGR intelligence-report indicated that at least four out-of-state cartels had also claimed significant competing spheres-of-influence within their own home state of Michoacán:

- the Tijuana Cartel controlling the seaport and municipality of Lázaro Cárdenas, as well as the towns of Coahuayana, Aguililla, Arteaga, and Tumbiscatío;
- the Sinaloa Cowboys dominating Tinguindín, Tocumbo, Los Reyes, Sahuayo, Jiquilpan, Purepero, Peribán, and La Piedad;
- the Juárez Cartel operating in Morelia, Zitácuaro, Huetamo, Jungapeo, Tiquicheo, Tuzantla, Benito Juárez, and Susupuato;
- the Sinaloa Cartel maintaining branches in Carácuaro, Tacámbaro, Nocupertaro, Villa Madero, Acuitzio, and Turicato;
- while the dissolving Colima Cartel of the Amezcua Contreras still retained some allies in Apatzingán, Tafetán, Tepalcatepec, Ario de Rosales, La Huacana, Buenavista, Tancítaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, and Nuevo Trecho.

La Barbie's shadowy campaign began, emulating the Zetas' will-of-the-wisp tactics by emerging at night—many of them outfitted with government-issue uniforms as disguises, one of which La Barbie himself wore on occasion—as well as bribing commanders of local law-enforcement units to commingle with their forces. These subterfuges allowed the infiltrators to rob or abduct midlevel Gulf Cartel distributors and money couriers, as well as raid drug houses and intercept consignments, all

designed to deplete their enemies' resources and resolve. Once the Gulf Cartel leadership realized that its rising losses in Nuevo Laredo were due to an orchestrated campaign, they ordered their Zeta paramilitary force to bolster its defenses so as to retain control over that vital smuggling-hub. The vicious, locally born ex-car thief Iván "El Talibán" Velazquez Caballero was appointed *plaza* boss, and observers such as a *New York Times* correspondent would later report: "The most spectacular gunfights began here last spring [2004], and usually took place from 8:00 in the morning to 1:00 in the afternoon, on the elegant Avenida Colón."

As often happened, neither side proved strong enough to defeat their opponents or gain any significant amount of territory, so that fighting would continue to flare up and die down for months. The Sinaloans, feeling that the Juárez Cartel had committed very little toward this joint endeavor and angered by their execution of a couple of El Chapo's traffickers for trespassing in their territory, assassinated the culprit Rodolfo "El Niño de Oro" Carrillo on September 11, 2004, breaking up this failing alliance. As the weakest and furthest-removed organization remaining in the struggle, the Milenio Cartel's under-strength efforts would also quickly slacken.

About the only good news enjoyed by the *milenios* came when 150 GAFE special-forces, supported by a like number of soldiers from the 21st Military Zone, apprehended their bitter foe "El Tísico" Rosales at 387 Hincuaje Street in the suburban Fraccionamiento Vista Bella south of Morelia, a couple of hours before dawn on Sunday, October 24, 2004. To offset this triumph, Felipe Erick Espinosa Valencia—a Milenio underboss stationed in Chiapas—was murdered along with Antonio Guízar Valencia and three other people on January 22, 2005, when a hit squad of unidentified gunmen attacked San Francisco Ranch on the Alto Amacohite *ejido* or "communal farm" in the municipality of Ostuacán, along the highway from Malpasito, Chiapas, toward La Chontalpa, Tabasco.

Targeted Leadership (August 2005)

The Gulf Cartel then redoubled its deadly efforts by launching a strike directly against the Milenio leadership. Just past midnight, while 250 guests were being hosted at El Carril horse-track in the municipality of Tonalá, Jalisco, by the *Asociación Mexicana de Criadores de Caballos Cuarto de Milla (Delegación Jalisco)* or "Mexican Quarter-Horse Breeders' Association (Jalisco Delegation)," unknown attackers lobbed two fragmentation grenades out of the darkness from a distance into the crowd of 100 or so bettors congregated in its attached *palenque* or "cockfighting pit" at 12:45 a.m. on Tuesday, August 2, 2005. Four people were killed in the ensuing blasts, another 27 maimed or wounded. The first police units to arrive on scene quickly realized that most victims at this gathering were affiliated with the Milenio Cartel—a minimum of eight having a "Valencia" surname—and noted the high proportion of foreign or out-of-state license plates among the 50 or so parked cars, suggesting that the perpetrators may have belonged to a rival Mexican syndicate. Statements were taken from 90 shaken guests, who were then freed to go home.

Given that this assault also marked the first occasion when a military grenade was used by cartel assassins in Mexico, suspicion fell on the Zetas—which was given credence when a phoned tip two days later warned that armed men had been seen driving around the municipality of Uruapan in

two Dodge Ram quad-cab pickups without license plates. They were intercepted by a swarm of Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) officers on Latinoamericana Avenue in that city's Colonia Huertas del Cupatitzio. Officials surmised that their ten uncooperative prisoners were actually Gulf Cartel Zetas, noting their expensive military-grade firearms, which included the latest German Heckler & Koch HK-91 semiautomatic assault rifles. Menacing phone-calls demanding the detainees' release also began to be received as soon as they were deposited at the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) headquarters in Morelia, so that 50 soldiers were brought in with four Hummers to act as extra guards overnight, and more than 50 Army, federal, and state police vehicles escorted the captives to Morelia's airport on August 5, 2005, to be flown away into captivity. It would nonetheless prove impossible to tie any of these culprits with the racetrack attack.

By now, PGR intelligence assessments indicated that while the Juárez and Gulf Cartels both maintained a presence in 21 states, and the Sinaloa Cartel in 17, the Valencias had lost a state, while their Amezcua Contreras methamphetamine partners had pretty much ceased to exist. And external threats still persisted: three former Guatemalan soldiers and five presumed Zetas were detained by the Army in September 2006 in Aguililla, Michoacán, equipped with 12 AK-47s and AR-15s, 3,000 rounds of ammunition, three fragmentation-grenades, black fatigues, tactical vests, and ten Kevlar ballistic helmets. That same month, the PGR's list of major cartels read as follows (in descending order of strength):

- Juárez Cartel run by Carrillo Fuentes
- Gulf Cartel controlled by Cárdenas Guillén
- Sinaloa Cartel run by Héctor Palma and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán
- Tijuana Cartel run by the Arellano Félix Organization
- Milenio Cartel of the Valencias
- Oaxaca Cartel, still being run by Pedro Díaz Parada (although he was about to be arrested)

Subordination and Dissolution (2006–2011)

The Milenio Cartel leaders Luis Valencia and "El Lobo" Nava Valencia—reeling from their defeats at the hands of the Gulf Cartel and federal authorities in northern Mexico, and with the frightening Zetas now overrunning their strongholds in eastern Michoacán—had finally withdrawn altogether from their home state in 2006, to retrench around their holdings in Jalisco, Nayarit, and western Michoacán. But their weakness also obliged them to enter into a defensive alliance which subordinated them to Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's Federación, their operational overseer becoming Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal, the Sinaloa Cartel's regional underboss, who promptly took over their methamphetamine trade inherited from the Amezcuas. Milenio workloads rose as they processed ever-larger cocaine consignments arriving from South America at Manzanillo, plus millions of U.S. dollars returning in proceeds—yet their individual incomes did not improve proportionately, so that disenchantment with this new arrangement gradually set in among the rank-and-file.

Depredations furthermore continued: Ventura Valencia Valencia—a brother of Luis Valencia and first cousin to Armando

Valencia—was abducted off a Morelia street next spring by a Zeta hit-squad on Saturday, April 14, 2007, after phoning his wife at 3:00 p.m. to tell her that he was on his way home to Aguililla. His tortured remains were found at dawn on April 17, dumped outside a hamlet named Piedras Blancas near Tepalcaltepec, Michoacán—along with a dog's carcass and a crudely-written message nailed to his chest that read: "*Saludos*, Luis Valencia Valencia, Óscar Nava Valencia, Armando Valencia González, El Mencho [Nemesio Oseguera, head of security for the Milenio Cartel]."

The *milenios* nonetheless adhered to their uncomfortable Sinaloan arrangement, even when Arturo Beltrán Leyva broke with "El Chapo" Guzmán and went to war against the Sinaloa Cartel as of May 2008. Then at 2:20 p.m. on Thursday, November 13, 2008, Jesús "El Chuy" Valencia Valencia—bearing an AK-47 plated in silver and gold, emblazoned with the word "Sinaloa"—was intercepted by local police while leading 18 heavily-armed *sicarios* disguised as AFI agents driving three vehicles in the municipality of Tonalá and transported to Mexico City inside an armored truck escorted by soldiers.

According to participants, the first inklings of an outright rupture between disgruntled Milenios and their Sinaloan bosses arose during the summer of 2009 when "El Lobo" Nava had a serious disagreement with his superior "Nacho" Coronel, during which they had "almost come to blows." The latter even attempted to have "El Lobo" Nava replaced, who was then rather conveniently detained by soldiers on October 28, 2009, along with nine of his *sicarios*, following a shootout at a *narcogranja* or "grow farm" that he was visiting in the municipality of Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, Jalisco. The suspicious timing of El Lobo's detention would be revisited later, once his brother and successor as Milenio leader—Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Nava Valencia—was also apprehended along with his sister Jaqueline Patricia Nava Valencia by Army special-forces off the streets of Colonia Providencia in the municipality of Guadalajara on Thursday, May 6, 2010, and flown away to Mexico City to face extradition to the United States.

At this point, the Milenios' internal chain-of-command indicated that Elpidio "El Pilo" Mojarro Ramírez was to succeed El Tigre, but a descendant of the original founding family—Erick "El 85" Valencia Salazar—instead proposed Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera, who had served as "El Lobo" Nava's head of security and was now performing this same task for Erick Valencia. Already dissatisfied with their subordination to the Sinaloa Cartel, several *milenio* lieutenants such as Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos González and Gerardo "El Tecato" Mendoza became convinced that their earlier leader "El Lobo" Navas had been betrayed to the authorities by "Nacho" Coronel and "El Mencho" Oseguera, so refused to go along with this suggested substitution.

Soon, disputed Milenio leader "El Mencho" Oseguera was demanding that the mutinous Gerardo Mendoza surrender to his authority, but this order was ignored. Instead, Mendoza killed a few of El Mencho's men in Tecomán, and Oseguera retaliated by abducting some 40 members of the dissident faction off the streets of San Cristóbal. Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos, leader of La Resistencia faction, would later relate to the authorities: "On May 10, 2010, clashes between the Milenio Cartel and the people of Nemesio Oseguera and Erik Valencia

began, and a month later the Jalisco New Generation Cartel was announced." Murders and counter-murders soared throughout June 2010, followed by massacres and beheadings, as both groups savaged one another and preyed upon their drug operations. To further compound matters, regional Sinaloa Cartel overseer "Nacho" Coronel was unexpectedly killed in Zapopan by military-intelligence officers on July 29, 2010, removing any hope of reconciliation or restraint between the two warring Milenio factions. In the resultant power-vacuum, Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera traveled to Sinaloa that same summer and arranged to maintain local operations in Jalisco as subordinates of the Sinaloa Cartel, seconded by his brother-in-law Abigael González Valencia, now leader of the shadowy group known as "Los Cuinis."

The Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG), was consequently formed in August 2010 to serve as a rival organization to La Resistencia. Its leader, "El Molca" Pozos, worked actively to forge an alliance with the Gulf Cartel and La Familia Michoacana, briefly creating an association known as the *Familia Milenio Golfo* or "Gulf Millennium Family" Cartel (MFG), which carried out some killings in Guadalajara—allegedly including the 26 bodies found near that city's Millennium Arches on November 23, 2011. However, "El Molca" Pozos was himself arrested by the Federal Police in September 2012, a gold-plated AK-47 being found in his possession.

Nominal Resuscitation (January 2011)

On Friday, January 28, 2011, *narcomantas* supposedly posted by the defunct Milenio Cartel started appearing around 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 1, and unknown gunmen began hijacking buses and large commercial vehicles around the city, gathering them at major intersections and setting them ablaze.

See also: Aguacates, Cártel de los; Cuinis, Los; FEADS; Methamphetamines; Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie"; Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003).

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Monterrey Casino Attack

(August 2011). Brazen daylight assault on a popular entertainment venue by Zeta extortionists, who set a fire that killed 52 people—mostly well-to-do civilians and women.

Background (January-May 2011)

The four-year-old Casino Royale "San Jerónimo" at 205 San Jerónimo Avenue, at the corner with Jesús María González Street in Monterrey, Nuevo León (the largest city in northern Mexico), was owned by the wealthy Raúl and José Alberto Rocha Cantú, along with several other similar businesses of their multistate Entertainment Enterprises of México, S.A. de C.V. Under mounting pressure to pay a weekly "fee" of 130,000 pesos to the local Zeta gang, their San Jerónimo establishment had already been robbed once by a group of armed men on January 17, 2011—an attack that the owners denied had even occurred in their statements to the police and press—and again during a sudden descent by gunmen in the early hours of May 25, 2011.

Firebomb Attack (August 2011)

Determined to increase the pressure, more than a dozen Zetas gathered for lunch shortly before 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 25, 2011, at a "special meeting" with one of their gang bosses at El Gran Pastor Restaurant on Gonzalitos Avenue, just a few blocks from their target. Given instructions to firebomb the Casino Royale, they departed El Gran Pastor around 3:00 p.m., driving two stolen pickups to a nearby Pemex gas-station in the Valle Verde neighborhood to fill up some large cans, before setting off on their mission. The extortionists arrived outside the casino entrance at approximately 3:50 p.m. in four stolen vehicles: a Mini Cooper, a Chevrolet Equinox SUV, a blue GMC pickup, plus a gray Volkswagen.

Authorities later released video-footage from a security camera showing some of the alleged assailants filling three cans at the gas station a few minutes before the attack. Video footage released earlier showed four vehicles with about a dozen men pulling up to the front of the casino Thursday afternoon; as some stand guard by their trucks and cars, others draw weapons and rush into the casino with the gasoline. Less than three minutes later, black smoke and red flames can be seen pouring out of the entertainment complex.

Monterrey residents marched on government offices Sunday and demanded Medina's resignation. More than 1,500 federal police officers were sent to the city in a show of force.

See also: Zeta Cartel (2010–2014).

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Mossberg Shotgun. Upgraded military version of a civilian firearm long manufactured by the O. F. Mossberg Corporation of New Haven, Connecticut, which in recent years has come to be used by both Mexico's armed forces and their *sicario* opponents.

Development (1960–2001)

The civilian version of this hammerless, repeater pump-action shotgun has been in production since 1960, and its sturdier military 590A1 version was already entering service when America's War on Terror began in 2001. With a thicker barrel and more durable metal parts so as to pass the U.S. Army's rigorous "Mil-Spec 3443E test"—which, among other factors, requires the successful firing of "3,000 rounds of full-power 12-gauge buckshot" under very adverse conditions—the Mossberg 590A1 was duly approved for purchase by the Pentagon, being selected by the U.S. Army's Special Forces Groups for close-quarters house-to-house combat, thanks to its great penetrating power at distances up to 100 yards. This "tactical" model of the Mossberg shotgun is also fitted with a "red dot" infrared night-scope, collapsible stock, plus other features.

Appearance in Mexico (2009–Present)

Thanks to cross-border straw purchases, this militarized weapon is known to have reached Mexico as early as May 2009, when *marinos* detained a cartel courier at Arroyo Seco in the municipality of La Huerta, Jalisco, who was transporting an arsenal that included two Mossberg shotguns in addition to other firearms, plus thousands of rounds of ammunition. And when a strike force of 150 soldiers supported by two helicopters assaulted the safe house of Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel Villarreal—Chapo Guzmán's regional Sinaloa Cartel boss—in the upscale Fraccionamiento Colinas de San Javier of Zapopan, Jalisco, on the afternoon of July 29, 2010, a brisk firefight erupted. Coronel's ten bodyguards were subdued, but the drug boss continued to resist with an M-16 assault rifle and a diamond-encrusted handgun, breaking out a window in his desperation to escape, before being driven back inside. Having killed one soldier and wounded another, Coronel was then struck in the torso and died instantly from two Mossberg 590 shotgun blasts, which the soldiers had brought along to *volar puertas* or "blow off doors."

See also: AK-47 Assault Rifle; AR-15 Rifle; Infantería de Marina: *Marino* Armaments; *Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos.*

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After five or six hours, the bodies had cooked away, and only grease remained.

—young Zeta executioner's callous description of burning victims' corpses in Allende, Coahuila (March 2011)

Narco-cemetery—see "Jardines del Humaya Cemetery"

Narcocorridos. Modern ballads, commonly portraying cartel figures in a favorable light by highlighting famous personages, heroic shootouts and deaths, rags-to-riches stories, etc.

Historical Background

As early as colonial times, *corridos* had been simple songs composed by self-taught street musicians and performed outside taverns, eateries, markets, and anywhere that people congregated in numbers. During the 19th century, some songs also began to narrate events of the day, such as executions of admired bandits, or injustices suffered by the poor. *Corridos* became especially popular during the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920, as so many non-uniformed irregulars joined the different armies that one distinguishing feature was to be the music played by each faction: northern rebels becoming identified with "La Adelita," a lively piece sung by Maderista troops under "Generals" Domingo and Mariano Arieta as they marched into Mexico City, later adopted by Pancho Villa's armies. Álvaro Obregón's well-disciplined force from Sonora would be recognized by "La Valentina," with "El Abandonado" being favored by conservative backers of the Porfirio Díaz and Victoriano Huerta regimes. Other *corridos* narrated the war's great battles, or noted the passing of noteworthy individuals, as well as recording the suffering of soldiers and peasants alike.

Narcocorridos Norteños

Modern *narcocorridos* follow a similar pattern, originating in the northern borderland states where many traffickers operate, and therefore written and sung in the local *norteño* style—by small bands typically comprising a singer backed by an accordion, 12-string *bajo sexto* guitar, bass, and drums. At a time when the government press and U.S. authorities were demonizing traffickers as criminal murderers, composers countered by portraying them as outlaws with a soft spot for the poor, driven into the drug trade by poverty, and alleviated by the hard-fought wealth that they had won—themes that quickly struck a chord among the lower classes, so that these songs rapidly spread across Mexico and into the American Southwest.

Hundreds more *narcocorridos* would flood radio stations, while successful bands played their latest hits live before huge sold-out crowds, furthermore adopting such names as "Calibre 50" in tribute to the powerful Barrett sniper-rifle, or "Banda Arkangel R15" for the AR-15 assault rifle. Incidents such as Joaquín "El Chapo"

Guzmán's escape from Puente Grande Prison in January 2001 would inspire numerous ballads, performed by such *norteño* stars as Los Buknas de Culiacán, Canelos de Durango, Las Fieraz, Larry Hernández, Valentín Elizalde, Tucanes de Tijuana, etc. The authorities would occasionally attempt to ban or suppress *narcocorridos*, with little success.

Cartel members themselves came to favor certain groups, the Arellano-Félix Organization liking Los Tucanes de Tijuana, while the Juárez Cartel preferred Los Tigres del Norte, etc. When Arturo Beltrán hosted a private *posada* or "Christmas party" in December 2009 at his luxurious mansion outside Cuernavaca, he hired the Texas-based musician Ramón Ayala, Los Bravos del Norte, and Los Cadetes de Linares to provide entertainment. But some bands discovered that admiration from one particular group could elicit enmity from rivals, so that concerts have occasionally been disrupted by gunfire and musicians killed—simply for playing the wrong *corrido.*

See also: Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Death of Arturo Beltrán; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo": Fugitive and Plotter.

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Narcomantas or narcomensajes. "Narco-blankets" or "narco-messages," hand-painted banners announcing gangs' claims or threats or intentions, usually put up overnight for public viewing—often adorned with dangling corpses.

Manta is simply the Spanish word for "blanket," but it has an additional meaning in Mexico: that of a large cloth or canvas painted with messages or slogans, intended to be unfurled in a public venue. For example, sports fans will smuggle *mantas de apoyo* or "support banners" into stadiums, so as to be held up while cheering on their favorite teams and players. Political protesters will carry *mantas de protesta* or "protest banners" concealed within their ranks into a political event, to be unveiled before news cameras as a means of airing grievances.

During Mexico's prolonged "War on Drugs," cartels posted thousands of *narcomantas*, mostly crude efforts rife with misspellings, grammatical errors, and curse words because they were produced by illiterate young graffiti-artists attached to the gangs. Very few were as eloquent as Arturo Beltrán's defiant *narcomanta* from late April 2008, posted prior to a federal sweep in Culiacán: *Soldaditos de plomo, federales de paja; aquí es territorio de Arturo Beltrán* or "Little lead soldiers, federal straw men; this is the territory of Arturo Beltrán." The drug boss then drove home his point by having four Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) agents shot dead next day, while driving through Colonia Guadalupe in the heart of

downtown Culiacán, plus two municipal policemen slain in nearby Imala.

Other "narco-messages" could be even more chillingly malevolent, such as when Ciudad Juárez's municipal police force was threatened in January 2008 by having 17 extra names painted overnight onto a monument for its fallen officers—three of these newly-added names being of recently murdered policemen, while six more would be assassinated by mid-May. Another type of graffiti was called a *pinta*, quickly daubed on a wall, a Juárez *sicario* confessing to his police interrogators in early 2009 that every time his gang carried out an execution, "they would add a *pinta* on a blank wall and call the local television station, so as to come and record it."

See also: Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto: Zeta Cartel Fracture; Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–Present): Inconclusive Guerra Zeta or "Zeta War".

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Narco-saints—see "Jesús Malverde," "San Judas," "Santa Muerte," "Santería"

Narco-submarines—see "Submarines"

Narcotanques. "Narco-tanks," large vehicles customized by cartel mechanics to serve as bulletproof personnel-carriers or cargo escorts.

Overview: Defensive and Offensive Armored Vehicles

Vehículos blindados or "armored vehicles" are classified by military professionals as *defensive* or *offensive*, according to their intended function. Like many wealthy civilians, drug bosses had long provided themselves with luxury "defensive" automobiles for their personal protection, reinforced with concealed steel-plating as well as bulletproof windows and tires, which they paid to have professionally installed by private security firms. Hidden compartments and gun-slits for some defensive counterfire could also be added, at specialized auto shops. As early as May 1993, Tijuana Cartel enforcer Ramón Arellano Félix had prowled Guadalajara with a dozen assassins in armored vehicles, seeking to murder his Sinaloa Cartel rival Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán—who was also being chauffeured in an armored green Buick.

But it was the Gulf Cartel's elite paramilitary group, Los Zetas—comprising largely Army deserters—who would introduce the widespread use of armored vehicles to the drug wars. One of their earliest missions was to transport two tons of cocaine in February 2002 through Nuevo Laredo,

Tamaulipas, for which they employed three armored Chevrolet Suburban SUVs—which proved stout enough to resist an attempted hijacking and retreat through a hail of bullets. By the time that a full-scale battle was being fought for control over that border-city three years later, the Zetas would be deploying heavily-armored customized "offensive" vehicles outfitted with gun turrets, which other gangs quickly emulated.

Soon, large pickups were being modified by disreputable mechanics to copy the Army's heavy-duty front bumper-grilles, steel-lined doors, metal enclosures pierced with gun apertures in their beds, and reinforced suspensions to act as "improvised armored fighting vehicles" (IAFVs). Such militarized pickups usually had to be kept concealed during daylight hours, while the practice of amateurishly armoring huge stolen trucks with thick, welded metal plates and matte-black paint jobs so as to produce an intimidating "monster" would not come until several years later—and for a specific purpose.

Narcotanques Monstruos or "Monster Narco-Tanks" (2010–2018)

Tensions between the Gulf Cartel and its ever more-powerful Zeta paramilitary group finally erupted into civil war as of February 2010. Within a month, bitter fighting was being waged for control over the drug-smuggling routes through the region known as the Frontera Chica, as small armies of gunmen clashed repeatedly around Mier, Camargo, Guerrero, Miguel Alemán, and San Fernando, soon spilling into Tampico and northern Veracruz. Since each side recognized the importance of its opponents' flow of moneymaking consignments, and was familiar with their traffic patterns after years of association, ambushes and hijackings became a tactical priority. The Zetas in particular responded to such threats by creating "monster tanks" to better protect their loads, and it soon became commonplace to see black multi-ton behemoths running at high speed through the night along the roads that branch out from the municipality of San Fernando [a town about 70 miles south of the U.S. border]. Such armored giants could smash their way through roadblocks, and safely enclose enough gunmen to engage in a firefight. A contemporary military spokesman declared: "The monsters are used only to monitor and protect the transfer of drugs carried out in rural areas of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, as protection from rival groups," adding that they had not been used in urban combat against the Army or other federal forces.

After one nocturnal firefight in northern Tamaulipas that same year of 2010, in which a Gulf Cartel contingent had bested a Zeta squad that arrived in a *monstruo*, its burned hulk was discovered next morning by the authorities—spray-painted with insults. The Army found another such monster buried under an earthen mound in the municipality of Progreso, Coahuila, in January 2011: a four-door Ford Super Duty pickup that had been modified with half-inch steel plating and reinforced axles. Its bed featured an armored, air-conditioned cabin with two gun towers, so that a total of 20 *sicarios* could be transported at a time.

A firefight between a Zeta patrol and Jalisco state policemen on May 20, 2011, resulted in five *sicarios* dead in the hamlet of Mezquitic, also leaving behind an abandoned "narco-tank" extemporized atop a pickup truck. Yet another heavily-armored Zeta *narcotanque*—complete with a turret and ram-shaped grille—was intercepted in early May 2011 by police in Ciudad Mier. It could travel at speeds up to 65 miles an hour and carry a dozen gunmen. It also featured

two gun ports through which bazookas, grenade launchers, and assault rifles could be fired, as well as a space in its rear through which nails or oil could be released onto the road to thwart pursuers. The arresting officers succeeded in halting and crippling this behemoth by destroying its tires with heavy-caliber rifle rounds.

On Saturday, June 4, 2011, a convoy of soldiers from the Eighth Military Zone based out of Reynosa, on a routine patrol around the 46-kilometer mark along the highway leading toward Nuevo Laredo [in an area known as La Ribereña in the Prolongación González district of Camargo, across the border from Rio Grande City, Texas], surprised and killed two armed men in a firefight, after which the soldiers entered a nearby warehouse that these suspects had been guarding. They found a large, makeshift Gulf Cartel machine-shop to build armored vehicles, seizing two air-conditioned dump trucks already painted matte black and with a protected injected-diesel system, reinforced with one-inch steel plating and modified to carry a dozen or more gunmen apiece; as well as two other unfinished dump trucks, plus 23 tractor-trailers and four backhoes, presumably all intended for similar modifications.

An Army spokesman commented afterward that "such vehicles were used to carry drugs to the banks of the Río Bravo, and in this fashion their transfer is secured, and they are only occasionally involved in armed confrontations." He added that the only military ordnance in that district capable of penetrating their armor were 20mm grenades employed by the *Sexto Regimiento Blindado de Reconocimiento* or "Sixth Armored Reconnaissance Regiment." This seizure brought the total of such vehicles confiscated in Tamaulipas to 109, roughly 70 being classified as *monstruos* or *monstruitos* ("little monsters").

Recent Revival (July–August 2018)

After an absence of many months, large *narcotanques* began reappearing among cartel armories during the summer of 2018. A 24th Infantry Battalion convoy patrolling along a stretch of highway between Yécora and Tarachi in the municipality of Arivechi, Sonora, on July 18, 2018, encountered three vehicles bearing *sicarios* who opened fire, before dispersing to avoid the Army's counter-barrage. The soldiers then found a crudely manufactured, improvised vehicle abandoned nearby—completely encased in armor plating, with a round protruding turret designed to protect gunmen, and bullet-proof tires—which they seized and dismantled a month later back at their base.

One month afterward, heavy *narcotanques* financed by the Gulf Cartel were also featured in a vicious three-hour attack against a band of gunmen from the "Metros" cell of the Cártel del Noreste or "Northeastern Cartel" at a hamlet known as Los Guerra in the rural municipality of Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas, on the night of August 20–21, 2018. Next morning, Fuerza Tamaulipas state policemen arrived to find the bullet-pocked hulks of two "narcotanks" left on this battlefield: a Dodge Ram 3500HD flatbed truck with a reinforced grille, bearing an elevated enclosure of steel plating on its bed, from which gunmen could fire in every direction; plus a Chevrolet Silverado double-cabin pickup with bulletproof tires and a smaller enclosure occupying its bed. Both had become stuck in the uneven terrain at night, and the Dodge Ram presumably set ablaze during the ensuing exchanges of gunfire.

***Blindados* or "Armored Vehicles"**

Because of mounting fears generated by the spread of criminal violence, international security companies such as Auto Safe had

begun establishing subsidiaries in Mexico as early as 1999, but—compared with enormous, custom-modified *narcotanques*—most automotive upgrades could only offer limited protection to occupants against the ever more-powerful military-grade firearms reaching cartel *sicarios*. For example, when a Zeta squad became engaged against a drug stash-house in Nuevo Laredo being guarded by rival Téjas gunmen in April 2005, the Zeta leader Omar (L-42) Treviño Morales blundered into three police squad-cars while rushing to his men's support, becoming pinned down along with his bodyguards. When the original squad arrived to rescue them, one *sicario* would later recall how Omar Treviño's:

> *. . . very dark blue* [Jeep Grand] *Cherokee, which was armored, had had its tires shot flat and was crashed into a light-post. Just behind it was Mateo's SUV, another Cherokee but of a light-brown color, also armored, with both firing back at the state policemen.*

The criminals succeeded in having their damaged SUVs towed into clandestine auto-shops for repairs, while they fled to Heriberto Lazcano's mountain retreat at Villa Hermoso to lie low. But even larger and heavier pickups that would be outfitted with thick metal plating could be set ablaze during gun battles.

See also: Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Civil War.

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Naval Special Forces—see "Infantería de Marina"

Noreste, Cártel del (2012–Present).

Self-proclaimed "Cartel of the Northeast," a surviving cell following the Zetas' disintegration, whose smuggling operation was largely confined to its border stronghold of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.

Foundation (1990s–2001)

Long before commanding the Zeta Cartel, Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales had started his criminal career by joining a small gang in this border-city called Los Téjas. His extensive family—including brothers Juan Francisco, Rodolfo, José, Omar, and sister María Arcelia, out of 13 children—had been moved from Nuevo Laredo by their parents, Rodolfo Treviño and Arcelia Morales, to resettle in a modest home in the Pleasant Grove neighborhood of Dallas, Texas, but some of their teenage offspring had reconnected with their old hometown's

gang. This outfit had begun as lowly *polleros* or smugglers of undocumented aliens during the 1980s under Arturo "El Téjas" Martínez Herrera, escalating into minor drug-trafficking and other illegal activities.

At first, the delinquent Treviños had run stolen cars down to them to be stripped or sold, bringing back purchased drugs to sell in the United States. In order to further this business, the eldest brother, Juan Francisco Treviño, invested some profits into establishing a landscaping company in Laredo, Texas, before being convicted of conspiracy to smuggle hundreds of pounds of marijuana across the border in 1995 and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

The remaining siblings nonetheless continued their criminal pursuits, circumstances changing after El Téjas' younger brother Guillermo "El Borrado" Martínez Herrera killed a Federal Police captain in 1999. Miguel Ángel Treviño rose to a Téjas lieutenancy amid the angry official reaction, before eventually quitting the gang to join the expansionistic and much more powerful Gulf Cartel under Osiel Cárdenas Guillén. Because of his firsthand local knowledge and fluency in English, Miguel Ángel Treviño was regarded as a valuable asset by his new boss, so he became a Gulf Cartel lieutenant assigned to work directly under Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén. Despite not being ex-military men, Miguel Ángel and younger brothers José and Omar Treviño would rise rapidly through the Zeta hierarchy over the next few years, all the while retaining some contact with relatives and friends in their old hometown.

Emergence (2015)

Eventually, the arrest in early March 2015 of Omar—the last Treviño brother to head the Zetas—brought an end to that cartel's shaky unity, as only the Nuevo Laredo faction accepted the succession of his 38-year-old nephew, Juan Francisco "El Kiko" Treviño Chávez, most other *plaza* bosses and detached operatives refusing to uphold his title, disgruntled by their organization's palpable decline under his uncles. Los Rojos remained isolated at Reynosa under the reluctant command of Mario "El Gordo" Cárdenas Guillén (younger brother of long-ago Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas), with the unpopular Juan Reyes "Quique" Mejía González as his second-in-command. Five or six more large cells also broke away, assuming names such as Zetas Sangre Nueva or "New-Blood Zetas," Sangre Zeta or "Zeta Blood," etc. Violent territorial disputes erupted, this infighting further weakening Zeta strength against their bitter Gulf Cartel foes, and precipitating a wholesale contraction of their holdings. Unpaid gunmen sustained themselves through kidnappings of civilians, extortions, car thefts, human trafficking, and whatever drugs they could scrounge or steal.

Because of such widespread fragmentation, "Kiko's" following became by default the most numerous surviving Zeta group, so that they optimistically renamed themselves the Cártel del Noreste or "Northeastern Cartel" (CDN) while retaining control over their stronghold at Nuevo Laredo and vying to reassert some claims in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí—notwithstanding that "Kiko" had already fled to Houston out of fear, issuing directives from a safe distance. One of the *norestita* or "Northeasterner" founders, Luis Reyes Enrique (Z-12) "El Rex" Velázquez Salazar, was arrested by *marinos* and Federal Police without resistance at 7:20 p.m. on August 11, 2015, at his home near the intersection of Gómez Morín Avenue and Villa Chipinque Streets in San

Pedro Garza García. And another Zeta faction that had separated earlier and dubbed itself the Zetas Vieja Escuela or "Old School Zetas" had taken over southern Tamaulipas and formed an alliance with the "Grupo Bravo" cell under Juan Pablo "El Oaxaco" Pérez García in its state capital of Ciudad Victoria.

Devastation (2016–Present)

The Cártel del Noreste launched an offensive on March 8, 2016, by posting badly written *narcomantas* in Ciudad Victoria—festooned with a few dead bodies—complaining about the willingness of President Enrique Peña Nieto to extradite drug bosses for trial in the United States, as well as threatening to wrest control of that state capital and southern Tamaulipas from the Zetas Vieja Escuela and their local Grupo Bravo allies. The Zetas Vieja Escuela responded a few days later with *narcomantas* of their own, chastising the CDN for its cruel treatment of civilians, while offering a million-peso reward for "Kiko" Treviño's head (whom they accused of hiding out in Nuevo León). Violence consequently surged, resulting in scores of deaths around Ciudad Victoria—which went unreported by its civic authorities, although it was noted that the Army seemed to concentrate its strikes against CDN infiltrators, thus favoring the Zetas Vieja Escuela.

Then on June 7, 2016, the latter posted a video on social media showing their interrogation and gruesome execution of José Wenceslao Gasnares González, a high-ranking Cártel del Noreste member, who years earlier had been a Tamaulipas State Police officer and a Ministerial Police commander in Nuevo Laredo. By late August 2016, it was being reported that "for more than ten months, two rival factions of the Zetas Cartel have been fighting for control over Tamaulipas," in particular Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Victoria. This fighting had grown to the point where abductions, drive-by shootings, gun battles, executions, beheadings, and dismemberments had become almost a daily occurrence—especially in Ciudad Victoria.

But the Northeast Cartel's absentee boss, "Kiko" Treviño, was arrested by U.S. Homeland Security agents on September 28, 2016, in Baytown, Texas [about 25 miles outside Houston], while Grupo Bravo's much more effective leader, "El Oaxaco" Pérez, was also apprehended by naval special-forces in Reynosa on January 20, 2017. The Cártel del Noreste had become so depleted by personnel losses and lack of income that the federal authorities announced it had been driven out of existence in a report published on March 30, 2017, although some survivors remained to be hunted down. The vengeful Zetas Vieja Escuela left the tortured bodies of four women and five men outside the entrance of a residence at the intersection of Abraham Lincoln and Díaz Ordaz Streets in Nuevo Laredo's Colonia Viveros at 8:25 a.m. on July 27, 2017, only a few yards from the international bridge-crossing to Laredo, Texas. This house belonged to one of the dead women—apparently victimized because she was related to the teenage hellion Pablo César "El Comandante Takia" Álvarez, a reputed Cártel del Noreste operative—whom they admonished in an accompanying narco-message:

> *What El Takia did to innocent people, was paid back in life. Sooner or later, everything must be paid for in this life.*

Six days later, another threatening narco-message was circulated on social media, threatening Cartel del Noreste survivors and Nuevo Laredo's citizenry in general:

> *People of Nuevo Laredo, tell your children to stop frequenting nightclubs. Without warning, we will throw out grenades and burn down the clubs and everything that finances the Noreste titas* ["Northeasterners" or CDN members].

Ana Isabel Treviño Morales—sister of the incarcerated Z-40 and Z-42, as well as Kiko's aunt—had succeeded as boss, before being detained in Mexico City herself in late November 2017. Kiko's younger brother Juan Gerardo "El Huevo" Treviño Chávez and Sofia del Carmen Monsiváis Treviño thereupon took over, the latter—the so-called cartel "heiress"—being captured by *marinos* while hiding out in a safe house in Nuevo Laredo's Campestre district, charged with directing the bloody assassination of Ricardo Martínez Chávez, regional head of the Tamaulipas Attorney-General's Office and four of his staff, who had been investigating bars and brothels that she ran as a source of income from human trafficking and forced prostitution. And in one final ugly act, ice chests were found stacked outside the Topo Chico, Apocada, and Cadereyta Prisons in distant Nuevo León at dawn on November 28, 2018—containing assorted body-parts from the deceased Luis Reyes (Z-12) or "El Rex" Velázquez, whose corpse had been stolen from a Nuevo Laredo funeral home two months earlier.

See also: Gulf Cartel; Zeta Cartel: Disintegration (2010–2014); Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–Present).

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O–P

The desert between Arizona and Sonora is hot, the coyotes are thirsty, and their victims are hungry.

—Alberto Tinoco, reporting from the "land of the coyotes": the human-trafficking hub at El Altar, Sonora (August 2004)

Oaxaca Cartel (1976–2006).

Relatively small and now defunct organization, also known as the "Díaz Parada" or "Isthmus" Cartel, founded by an impoverished rural family.

Early History (1965–1976)

One of nine children born to Pedro Díaz and Valeriana Parada in the village of Santa María Zoquitlán, Oaxaca [population: 1,200], Pedro Díaz Parada would eventually lead his entire family into the lucrative drug business. Legend has it that at 15 years of age, he traveled north with a small quantity of his own homegrown marijuana, which he then personally smuggled piecemeal across the border with a backpack as a lone *burrero*, before returning to Oaxaca with several hundred American dollars in profits to lease a parcel of land in his father's hometown, the neighboring hamlet of San Pedro Totolapan in the Valles Centrales region.

Teenage Pedro began planting larger crops—allegedly with a single plow, pulled by an elderly horse—but as he entered his 20s, he was joined in the business by his younger brothers Eugenio Jesús and Domingo Aniceto Díaz Parada. However, because their initial output was so low-grade and they lived far from the American border, their marijuana and opium-growing venture did not really begin to prosper until the American consumption-boom of the early 1970s.

Emergence (1977–1984)

Steadily growing in size and wealth, the Díaz Parada brothers' presence among Oaxaca's growers first received official notice when Pedro was indicted—along with his younger siblings Aniceto and Manuel, plus 90 other individuals—in a police sweep conducted on March 30, 1977, although general charges of posing a "threat to public health" were soon dropped, resulting in early release and no further prosecution. The Díaz Paradas would be largely spared any more legal problems over the next few years, after their first cousin Fernando Adolfo Garrido Parada was appointed director of the Policía Judicial del Estado or "State Judicial Police" (PJE) during the early 1980s. As leader of the family syndicate, Pedro had noted the value of gratifying public officials—especially in such an unsupervised, backwater state as Oaxaca—through generous financial contributions and outright bribes, so that his political leverage increased.

First Convictions (1985–1992)

During the massive manhunt unleashed after the abduction and cruel murder in February 1985 of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena, Pedro Díaz Parada was arrested while attempting to fly out of Mexico City

toward Central America on April 24, 1985, being charged because of his connections to the Tijuana Cartel. Upon being sentenced that same July 3 to pay a 1.4 million-peso fine, and serve 33 years in the state prison at Santa María Ixcotel, Oaxaca, he threatened the presiding federal judge, Pedro Villafuerte Gallegos, with the words: "I am going away from here, and you are going to die." Within six days, Díaz Parada—having laid out an estimated 150 million pesos in bribes, as well as leaving behind 6 million pesos in his cell—escaped from confinement, with the help of the prison director, Miguel Ángel Varela Sánchez [who tried to explain away this dereliction of duty by pointing out that he had received specific instructions from the state's interior minister to give "special treatment" and "every type of facilities" to that particular prisoner, inadvertently helping Díaz Parada to escape].

Resuming his cartel leadership, Díaz Parada made good on his threat two years later, as Judge Villafuerte's body was found near his safe house in Cuernavaca's Colonia Reforma district on September 20, 1987, riddled with 14 bullet wounds and a coup-de-grâce shot to the head—an urban legend quickly appearing in the popular press, alleging that the judge's body had been found pierced with 33 gunshots, with a note nearby reading: "One bullet per year." Less than two years later, the allotment of *plazas* and corresponding drug-territories by the influential underworld coalition once headed out of Guadalajara by the "godfather" Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, declared in the spring of 1989 that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was to remain controlled—although not monopolized—by the Díaz Parada family. Oaxaca and Chiapas were to be regarded as neutral crossroads, allowing free passage for shipments being brought up out of South America by the emergent Tijuana, Juárez, Gulf, and Sinaloa Cartels, an arrangement that no gang could disturb by *calentando* or "heating up" this non-aligned territory for their own benefit.

Now commonly known as the *Cacique de Oaxaca* or "Chieftain of Oaxaca," Díaz Parada was arrested for a second time on May 3, 1990, but again escaped—this time from the Federal Reclusorio Oriente in Mexico City, through a patiently-crafted scheme: one of his confederates approached that institution's management in October 1991 posing as a potential supplier, and offering commissary foodstuffs at significant discounts. The managers greedily accepted and a large truck began making regular deliveries, until finally Díaz Parada masqueraded as one of its work-crew and was driven away amid an inmate diversion on Friday afternoon, January 17, 1992. During his incarceration, the Oaxaca Cartel leadership had passed seamlessly into the hands of his brothers Eugenio Jesús and Domingo Aniceto, with support from their experienced lieutenants Ignacio Luna Toledo and Apolinar Albarrán Salazar.

Colombian Connection (1995–2006)

The Díaz Paradas' profits would soar exponentially after Baltazar Díaz Vega, leader of a drug cell that imported cocaine directly from Colombia, was murdered in Mexico City on January 27, 1995. In the ensuing succession struggle, Pedro Díaz Parada supported the deceased's brother Miguel Guadalupe in retaining that organization's command, and was able to use a grateful Díaz Vega's introductions to strike a separate lucrative deal with the Colombian drug-boss Óscar Ovidio Macías Restrepo of Barranquilla (whose wife, María Guadalupe Granados Bocanegra, was furthermore a native of Totolapan).

Given the Díaz Parada cartel's dominance throughout Oaxaca, with many high state officials and police commanders now on their payrolls, they chose to bring these South American consignments in via nocturnal *bombardeos* or "bombardments" along the Pacific coast—a time-tested smuggling tactic of releasing sealed packets from a low-flying aircraft or passing ship into the sea, to remain afloat until they could be gathered by boats pushing out from shore. By the year 2000, it was an open secret that clandestine seaplane-flights were departing most evenings from the tiny Guatemala port of Ocoz, to fly low along the Mexican coastline until they arrived at night over such lonely spots as Morro Ayuta or Morro Mazatán Beaches between Salina Cruz and Huatulco, Oaxaca, or above quiet inland lakes such as Chacalen or Cachahua, to drop sealed packets into the waters for retrieval. Díaz Parada's minions would then conceal these bundles in caves around San Mateo del Mar, Juchitán, San Dionisio del Mar, San Francisco del Mar, etc., before moving them cross-state to be dispatched north aboard light aircraft or sped up the Gulf Coast aboard "fast-boats."

Díaz Parada's brother Manuel was murdered by two gunmen outside the Margarita Hotel in Oaxaca City on May 11, 1996, allegedly over a $150,000 debt. Pedro and his other brothers took their revenge five weeks later by sending seven black-clad assassins wearing bulletproof vests with the words "Policía Judicial" emblazoned on their fronts and backs to the home of one of the murderers in Cuernavaca's Colonia Santa Anita on June 17, 1996—where they massacred his parents, two brothers, and the maid.

Decline and Withdrawal (2005–2007)

Thanks to the low profile maintained in their remote rural backwater, Pedro Díaz Parada was not even named by the DEA as a major drug trafficker until 2004, after belatedly learning that he had been conducting business through dealers in Brownsville and Houston. However, a national assessment next year of the relative strengths of Mexico's cartels by the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) reported that the Díaz Parada group "was starting to flicker out," most of its younger generation having applied their personal fortunes toward becoming wealthy businessmen or landowners, or elected to a variety of municipal and state offices. By September 2006, the PGR's list of seven major cartels operating in Mexico read as follows (in descending order of strength and wealth):

- Juárez Cartel run by the Carrillo Fuentes
- Gulf Cartel controlled by the Cárdenas Guillén
- Tijuana Cartel run by the Arellano Félix Organization
- Colima Cartel of the Amezcua Contreras brothers
- Sinaloa Cartel run by Héctor Palma and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán
- Milenio Cartel of the Valencias
- Oaxaca Cartel, still being run by Pedro Díaz Parada

And after 15 years as a fugitive, the 56-year-old *Capo del Istmo* or "Boss of the Isthmus [of Tehuantepec]" was arrested one last time by soldiers and Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) agents. Acting on a tip from the Subprocuraduría de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Deputy Attorney-General's Office for Specialized Organized Crime Investigations" (SIEDO), they intercepted Pedro Díaz

Parada late on the afternoon of January 16, 2007, while he was driving alone near Oaxaca City toward Tule in a pickup with an AR-15 and .357 Magnum revolver by his side—weapons that were "prohibited under the Federal Firearms and Explosives Law," thereby furnishing legal grounds for his immediate detention and a search of his properties.

While he was being transported to Mexico City and held in SIEDO facilities, a search warrant was executed at his La Providencia Farm at the kilometer 10 marker of the Oaxaca City-Tule highway, where a half-dozen more long rifles and five million pesos were seized. Díaz Parada was eventually tried and sentenced to 15 years' incarceration in the Altiplano maximum-security penitentiary, leadership of his cartel remnants being assumed by his brothers Eugenio Jesús "Don Chuy" and Domingo Aniceto "Don Cheto" Díaz Parada.

Disappearance (2007–Present)

Pedro's incarceration was followed less than three months later by the kidnapping of his younger brother Jesús or "Don Chuy" by 20 masked gunmen in a convoy of white pickups, who abducted him at 8:45 p.m. on April 3, 2007, then switched vehicles some two miles away before disappearing. He would not be released until a ransom was paid that same October, the perpetrators turning out to be a strong-arm state police unit known as the Unidad Ministerial de Intervención Táctica or "Ministerial Tactical-Intervention Unit" (UMIT), raised and directed by the corrupt Secretary General of the state's PRI Party, Jorge "El Chucky" Franco Vargas. Jesús Díaz Parada and his son Luis Díaz Pantoja (a former *presidente municipal* or "municipal president" of San Pedro Totolapan) responded to this mistreatment by traveling to Mexico City and swearing out a deposition before SIEDO officials on February 22, 2008, complaining about being targeted by state and federal forces bent upon extortion.

Soldiers and AFI agents raided a family property at 315 Sabinos Street on Saturday afternoon, March 27, 2010, as well as various others in Oaxaca City's Colonia Reforma, plus more in the neighboring municipalities of Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán and Tlalixtac de Cabrera, after which they arrested Jesús Díaz Parada and transported him to the SEIDO jail in Mexico City—although he would eventually be released. In February 2011, one of the Oaxaca Cartel's few remaining gunmen was abducted outside his San Pedro Totolapan home, and his headless corpse returned—shredded by 32 heavy AK-47 rounds—and left propped up against the main gate of El Jabalí Ranch, owned by the Díaz Parada family at the kilometer 69-500 marker on the Transístmica or "Trans-Isthmic" Highway. And Luis Díaz Pantoja and his two brothers were arrested on October 10, 2013, on charges of selling marijuana, endangering public health, and a lingering connection with the family's Cártel del Istmo.

See also: Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI); Altiplano Prison; AR-15 Rifle; Milenio Cartel; *Plaza*.

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Paraquat—see "'Condor,' Operation"

Petroleum Thefts—see "Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014– Present): Fuel Thefts"

***Plaza*.** "Place" or "public square," but which in Mexico's underworld refers to a monopoly held over a specific geographic area by an acknowledged crime-boss.

A rudimentary *plaza* system had existed since the 1940s, and when trafficking in marijuana and low-grade heroin became significantly more profitable during the late 1970s, it was reinvigorated by corrupt police and Army officers—most especially Dirección Federal de Seguridad or "Federal Security Directorate" (DFS) field agents, with connivance from PRI politicians. Sanctioned drug-corridors were unofficially established at strategic chokepoints leading toward the United States, such *plazas* not being controlled by criminals but rather serving as checkpoints where traffickers would be met by a *federal* or military detachment collecting transit-fees and punishing any defaulters. This arrangement allowed its regulators to keep the drug trade under control, damping down any public acts of violence, while profiting themselves—and even making the occasional seizure, just to demonstrate that they were ardently fighting the "War on Drugs."

Some commentators would later argue that this dishonest system restrained gang violence and protected the public through enforcement of a *Pax Narcótica* or "Drug Peace"—sometimes called *Pax Mafiosa* or "Mafia Peace." The veteran Federal Deputy Attorney-General José Santiago Vasconcelos would wearily observe during a press interview in December 2005—as vicious urban warfare raged between the Gulf and Sinaloa Cartels for control over the lucrative smuggling-hub at Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas—that such unbridled brutality could be attributed to the rise of a younger generation of rash and ruthless traffickers, in the wake of the jailing of older bosses who had been willing to arrange truces, respect boundaries, and keep their criminal activities out of public view. In contrast, Vasconcelos said that new operators fought "for all or nothing" and seemed willing to prolong their fights, no matter what the cost:

> *Why are we in this situation? Because the only leaders who can contain the violence are the ones who are in jail. The structures which they used to maintain—of corruption and obstruction of justice—when we took those away, they were forced to use violence. It's a beast.*

Modern *plazas*, controlled by powerful cartel-bosses and not government surrogates, are not limited to major border-cities such as Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Reynosa, and Matamoros; some can be found in busy seaports like Culiacán, Mazatlán, Acapulco, Lázaro Cárdenas, Tampico, Coatzacoalcos, and Veracruz; others exist deep within the country's interior like Monterrey or Guadalajara; etc. A *plaza* can encompass a certain sector of a city, or an entire metropolis; a municipality or county; a state or region, but its core definition remains the same: a clearinghouse to regulate all illicit business within its boundaries

and environs, managed by a resident crime-boss who compels all local lawbreakers to pay quotas (a practice known simply as *pagar plaza* or "pay *plaza*"), as well as charge *derecho de piso* fees from transient outsiders who wish to pass through with drug consignments or stolen goods, etc.

Shortly after the influential Guadalajara Cartel *padrino* or "godfather" Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo's arrest in April 1989, he suggested that his disintegrated association's loose patchwork of groups gather to peaceably work out and formalize their respective jurisdictions—mediated by Federal Judicial Police *comandante* General Guillermo González Calderoni. A summit meeting was duly held in the resort city of Acapulco (considered neutral ground because of its international fame), during which *plazas* were allocated to the following:

- **Tijuana, Baja California:** Jesús "El Chuy" Labra Avilés [uncle of the cut-throat Arellano Félix brothers]
- **Tecate, Baja California [east of Tijuana]:** Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera [Félix Gallardo's driver and favorite from years ago]
- **Mexicali, Baja California:** Rafael "El Chino" Chao López, a corrupt DFS officer [who would be arrested this same year in Manzanillo, Colima]
- **San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora [opposite San Luis, Arizona]:** Jesús Héctor Luis "El Güero" Palma Salazar
- **Nogales south to Hermosillo, Sonora:** Emilio Quintero Payán [uncle of the incarcerated Guadalajara Cartel co-founder Rafael Caro Quintero]
- **Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, to Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas:** Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, an ex-DFS regional commander
- **Nuevo Laredo to Matamoros, Tamaulipas:** retained by the Gulf Cartel under Juan García Ábrego
- **Sinaloa:** Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and Baltazar Díaz Vera [Félix Gallardo's longtime lieutenants]

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec was to remain controlled—but not monopolized—by the Díaz Parada family, Oaxaca and Chiapas being designated as a neutral crossroads for South American shipments imported by any cartel. Manuel Beltrán Félix, Rigoberto Campos, and Javier Caro Payán were to circulate freely among all these entities, acting as liaisons and resolving disputes.

Given the multimillion-dollar profits already being generated by trans-shipments of Colombian cocaine, some of these appointments would be quickly contested. The avaricious Arellano brothers claimed the entire 100-mile borderland eastward from their Tijuana *plaza*, as far as Tecate and Mexicali, savaging any traffickers who dared trespass on their territory. "El Chapo" Guzmán was consequently compelled to forgo his title to Tecate's *plaza* for another couple of decades, instead remaining partners with Héctor "El Güero" Palma in Sonora, while creating a loose-knit Federación or "Sinaloa Cartel" with Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and other lesser traffickers in 1990. Amado Carrillo Fuentes, nephew of the incarcerated Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, would have Juárez *plaza*-boss Rafael Aguilar murdered on April 12, 1993, followed three weeks later by his successor, Rafael Muñoz Talavera, to seize that particular stronghold. Emilio Quintero Payán was killed on April 29, 1993, when his chauffeur-driven car was pulled over at a shopping center in Mexico City's northern suburb of Ciudad Satélite, to be succeeded as Nogales's *plaza*-boss by Miguel Caro Quintero.

Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno negotiated a truce between the Juárez and Gulf Cartels in late November 1993 at Cuernavaca, Morelos, so greatly easing tensions for all traffickers that it became known as the *Paz del Norte* or "Peace of the North." For beyond the huge sums derived from narcotics, many other sources of illicit income could be tapped by *plaza* titleholders, making them highly-coveted prizes. In March 2002, the magazine *Proceso*—while acknowledging that Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas was "responsible for thirty percent of the cocaine sold in the United States market"—enumerated the many other factors contributing toward his immense wealth:

- collecting *derecho de piso* transit-fees from lesser traffickers at every significant border-crossing in Tamaulipas (Matamoros, Reynosa, Díaz Ordaz, Camargo, Miguel Alemán, Ciudad Mier, etc.);
- importing high-powered American weaponry for resale at hefty markups in Mexico, plus unavailable consumer products to sell as contraband items on the black market;
- granting permissions to independent operators to run houses of prostitution or drug dens, as well as for jewelers to deal in precious stones, cross-border auto theft rings to bring in stolen cars;
- even city ambulance services and lowly *polleros* who guided undocumented aliens through the desert into the United States,

all had to pay a stipend to the Gulf Cartel *plaza*-boss or risk being painfully put out of business. Battles would consequently be fought over such captive areas, many launched by treacherous lieutenants, if not better-armed rivals.

See also: Arellano-Félix Organization: Seizure of Power and First Challenges; *Derecho de piso*; Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS); Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel.

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Policía Judicial—see "Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI)"

Poppy—see "Heroin"

Pozole—see "Body Disposals"

S–T

Comply with your promises, or fight against the beast.

—threatening Zeta message for Guatemala's president, broadcast live from a Cobán radio-station (December 27, 2010)

San Judas. Saint Judas Thaddeus, traditionally venerated as one of Christ's martyred Apostles, invoked during difficult times or in aid of lost causes.

San Hipólito Church in the historic heart of Mexico City is the center of this Apostle's devotion throughout Mexico, being the only church with a shrine dedicated to Saint Judas erected during the past three centuries. Located in run-down Colonia Cuauhtémoc, a district with very high crime-rates, it has long welcomed the poor and downtrodden, as well as social outcasts such as addicts and prostitutes and delinquents, in hopes of setting them on a righteous path. Most who visit this church are poor, marginalized young individuals, generally between 13 and 20 years of age.

San Judas Tadeo has become especially popular among drug abusers and dealers, some even invoking the saint's help in getting away with their crimes. According to Father José de Jesús Aguilar Valdés, a director of the Archdiocese of Mexico's radio and television service, this saint's association with criminals came about from the illegal copying of his image onto prints in Italy, reversing the hand on his staff from right to left. Since "left" is often symbolically connected with evil in historical lore, Mexican folk-belief has come to view Judas Tadeo as a saint for both good and bad; more extreme devotees may also venerate Santa Muerte and Jesús Malverde.

When a strike force of Navy special-forces surrounded one of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's suspected safe-houses in Culiacán's Colonia Libertad on February 17, 2014, they captured one of the drug lord's young bodyguards wearing an expensive automatic pistol around his waist, its white grips bearing the words "San Judas;" another .38-caliber Super automatic featured the letters "JGL" for "Joaquín Guzmán Loera" engraved in semiprecious stones, the young *sicario* explaining that these weapons belonged to his boss, to whom he had been taking them.

See also: Jardines del Humaya Cemetery; Jesús Malverde; Santa Muerte.

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Santa Muerte. Ghoulish sect that has taken root in Mexico, dedicated to "Saint Death," embraced by traffickers and cartel gunmen.

The Catholic Church has denounced the "blasphemous cult" of Santa Muerte as a *falsa devoción* or "false veneration," its devotees typically worshipping a skeletal figure wearing different guises. Many criminals make appeals and offerings for protection and success during the commission of their felonies, Santa Muerte being also known as *La Santísima* or "The Most Holy"; *La Niña Blanca* or "The White Girl"; *San La Muerte*; *Señor de la Buena Muerte* or "Lord of Good Death"; *Señor de la Paciencia* or the "Lord of Patience"; *San Justo Nuestro Señor de la Buena Muerte*; *Nuestro Señor de Dios y la Muerte*; *San Esqueleto* or "Holy Skeleton"; *Ayucaba*; *Señor Que Todo Lo Puede* or "Lord Who Can Do All"; *San Severo de la Muerte*; etc. It has been reported that some fanatical followers even perform human sacrifices as part of their rituals.

When hundreds of Zeta gunmen began flooding into Piedras Negras, Coahuila, during September 2012 to defend that border-city against a projected Sinaloa Cartel assault, worried citizens noticed how shortly after these reinforcements had arrived, scores and then hundreds of small altars began to appear all around the city dedicated to Santa Muerte, one anonymous eyewitness later reporting:

> *Here we could identify the Zetas, because they all carried amulets of the Santa Muerte. They all have them, or have it tattooed on their bodies.*

Eventually, after the Zetas were compelled to withdraw from Coahuila in defeat a few years later, most of their altars in Piedras Negras and Matamoros were destroyed by the Army and Federal Police, often found concealed underneath bridges or down dark alleyways.

See also: Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Death of Arturo Beltrán, "Boss of Bosses"; Jardines del Humaya Cemetery; Jesús Malverde; Santería; Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): Fragmentation and Decline.

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Santería. Variant of an Afro-Cuban voodoo sect, embraced by cartel *sicarios* in the mistaken belief that its observances will render them invulnerable.

Historical Background (1960s–1988)

Santería first arrived during the 1960s, after Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution had driven exiles out of that island nation to resettle elsewhere, some in Mexico. Over the next two decades, its original religion—whose peaceful tenets merely seek to subjectively explain illnesses related to the supernatural world, and also represent a cultural identity based upon a defined hierarchy—gained a few local converts who became known as *santeros*, after undergoing a rite of passage bonding them with their ritual family to form part of a lineage stretching back to earlier generations. The *madrina* or "godmother" and *padrino* or "godfather" of each "family" was in charge of its members' religious education, which included rites taken from Cuban teachings.

Narcosatánicos de Matamoros (April 1989)

Santería's unnoticed existence as a tiny religious minority would end on April 9, 1989, when a police checkpoint at the 39-kilometer marker along the Matamoros-Reynosa highway in Tamaulipas, pulled over a station wagon driven by 22-year-old David Serna Valdez. A quick inspection of his vehicle found traces of marijuana and a .38-caliber pistol, so that the young man was arrested, and after several hours of interrogation he confessed to being an adherent of a "black magic" sect at the nearby Santa Elena Ranch, which practiced human sacrifices. The subsequent police-raid on that compound discovered 110 kilos of marijuana, as well as a large fetid cauldron holding machetes, dried blood, 40 empty liquor bottles, garlic strands, a cooked turtle, cigarette butts—and a human brain. A mass grave with a dozen dismembered bodies was furthermore found outside, one of which proved to be the legless corpse of an American medical student named Mark Kilroy, who had vanished in March 1989.

Such gruesome discoveries created a sensation throughout Mexico, most people being repulsed by the Satanic practices, erroneously attributing them to Santería—although with the passage of time, some criminals and drug traffickers became devotees of this twisted version, reinforced by lurid depictions in the popular press and movies.

Police Santeros (April 2011)

Not only criminals resorted to such beliefs; in April 2011, it was reported how Tijuana sanitation-workers were finding remnants of sacrificed chickens along lonely stretches of beach—turning out to be from nocturnal Santería rituals held under full moons by a number of municipal policemen, as a superstitious means of acquiring additional safeguards against bodily harm. Many also sported *santero* tattoos depicting war gods or other macabre imagery, intended to repel metals. One of these officers explained to a reporter:

> *We noticed how* narcos *went here and there, and nothing happened to them. This was because of their* narcosatánico *rituals and veneration of Santa Muerte. Therefore, we decided to follow* Santería*, and others to get tattoos for our protection.*

Their Cuban-born *santero* Eddy Carrillo, who performed these nighttime Yoruba rituals as "godfather" for the policemen, clarified:

> *These are not shields, they are not breastplates; they also depend upon these officers behaving well, honestly, and avoiding negative situations. The same is true of the necklaces and amulets which we give them.*

And the policeman concluded his interview with the observation that he would even plead with his own gun: "'Don't fail me, don't fail me,' whenever I shoot."

During a video recorded in June 2011, a midlevel Zeta *sicario* named Édgar "El Wache" Huerta Montiel stated that he and his wife had taken a 15-day vacation to Cuba to become *santos* or "saints" through a cleansing Santería ritual performed in a private home. When asked whether this rite had given him the desired protection, Huerta tersely replied: "No."

See also: Beheadings; Jardines del Humaya Cemetery; Jesús Malverde; Santa Muerte.

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Sinaloa Cartel—see Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo": Creation of the Sinaloa Cartel"

Submarines. Stealthy means for conveying cocaine from Colombia, although not used by any Mexican cartels to smuggle these loads on into the United States.

For more than a decade, Colombian cartels have custom-built semisubmersibles whose low freeboards allow them to glide undetected across the sea. Upon arriving off Mexico, fast-boats would meet these vessels in open waters and speed their cargoes into the coast, to be hidden ashore in stash houses. When a 33-foot-long *narco* submarine was spotted traveling slowly 120 miles off Oaxaca's southwestern coast on July 16, 2008, a Mexican Navy special-forces team was quickly flown out by helicopter and rappelled down onto its heaving deck, arresting the four startled crewmen before they could scuttle their craft—which was then towed by a patrol boat into Huatulco, and 5.8 tons of cocaine extracted. A second submarine was intercepted 350 miles east of Guatemala by the U.S. Coast Guard that same September 2008, netting another similar-sized cargo.

See also: Infantería de Marina: Tactical Units; Oaxaca Cartel: Colombian Connection.

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Tanks—see "Narcotanques"

Tepic Strafing (2017). Very public aerial strike targeting the fugitive Beltrán-Leyva lieutenant Juan Francisco Patrón Sánchez, witnessed and recorded by hundreds of shocked civilians.

Background (September 2016)

Four months earlier, an Army patrol had been attacked on the night of September 29, 2016, as it swept through the hamlet of Bacacoragua in the municipality of Badiraguato, Sinaloa. The soldiers returned fire and wounded Julio Óscar "El Kevin" Ortíz Vega—believed to be a cousin of the Sinaloa Cartel's imprisoned leader, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán—and carried him away in an ambulance, only to be ambushed again a few hours later, while reentering Culiacán out of its north at 3:25 a.m. via Highway México 15 from Huixiopa. This second *sicario* assault to free Ortíz involved very heavy firearms such as .50-caliber Barrett M82 rifles and grenade launchers, leaving 5 young soldiers of the 24th Compañía de Infantería No Encuadrada (CINE) dead and ten others badly wounded [CINE being a military acronym for a unit that is "not squared away;" i.e., operating understrength or below its allotted complement].

General Alfonso Duarte Mújica, the Third Military Zone's commander, vowed revenge for this bloody attack, a sentiment echoed that same day by President Enrique Peña Nieto and many other members of the

armed forces. One hundred GAFE commandos were flown into Culiacán as reinforcements aboard a Mexican Air Force Boeing 727 that same Friday afternoon of September 30, 2016, and at least 175 people were subsequently detained in a statewide hunt for its perpetrators. It was soon learned that 24-year-old Alfredo "El Mochomito" Beltrán Guzmán—inexperienced son of the incarcerated Beltrán-Leyva boss, whose criminal syndicate had been driven into exile in Guadalajara and was facing defeat by the Sinaloans for control over Nayarit's drug-traffic—had orchestrated this ambush through his subordinate Patrón Sanchez, hoping to blame it on the sons of "El Chapo" Guzmán.

Public Firefight (February 2017)

The armed forces began hunting for Beltrán-Leyva bosses with particular zeal, and at 8:00 p.m. on February 9, 2017, an apprehension order was issued to the 15-man "Puma" assault-group of the *Unidad de Operaciones Especiales de la Marina* or "Naval Special-Operations Unit" (UNOPES) stationed in Tepic, directing them to proceed with an operation code-named "Barcina"—a hand-woven native basket common to Nayarit, used to wash, drain, and sun-dry shrimp. A hideout on unpaved Cardenal Street in a development known as Colonia Ampliación Linda Vista was detected, intelligence reports suggesting that the 40-year-old Patrón—nicknamed "El Chico" or "H-2," last surviving field-commander for the hard-pressed Beltrán-Leyva Organization—was intending to spend the night there.

When the strike team attacked that same night at 9:30 p.m., this custom-built civilian residence proved to be strongly reinforced with thick concrete walls, steel doors, and a second-floor pillbox overlooking its entrance, so that the *marinos* were checked and a prolonged firefight ensued. Warnings were thereupon broadcast to neighbors through loudspeakers, instructing them to remain indoors, while the naval special-forces called in air support in the form of a UM-60 M "Black Hawk" helicopter from the nearby Navy air-station. A few sustained bursts from its powerful M134 Mini Gun subdued all resistance atop and inside the strong-house, after which a Humvee battered down its thick doors. Inside, the *marinos* found Patrón Sánchez and seven of his *sicarios* dead. Another five would be slain near the airport as they attempted to flee in an SUV toward Trigonal near Pantanal, Jalisco, while one more died on the run from El Ahuacate toward Duraznito.

Civilian residents of this well-to-do Linda Vista neighborhood were left shaken by this display of naval firepower, many having used their cell phones to record the six-second stream of tracer-rounds raining down out of the night sky, and being broadcast on national television. Commentators and opposition politicians such as Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Morena Party openly worried that the country was sliding deeper into anarchy, and that such warlike encounters would become more commonplace.

See also: Badiraguato; Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Decline and Dissolution; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Infantería de Marina.

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Tijuana or Arellano Cartel (1989–Present).

One of Mexico's earliest drug-trafficking syndicates, thanks to this city's strategic border-position and longstanding toleration of illicit activities.

Disputed Usurpation by the Arellanos (1989–1993)

During the 1980s, the young Sinaloan brothers Benjamín and Ramón Arellano Felix entered Tijuana's criminal underworld through the patronage of Jesús "El Chuy" Labra Avilés, a trafficker married to a sister of their mother's. Benjamín soon rose to a position of prominence under the reigning local crime-boss, Javier Caro Payán, a cousin of Rafael Caro Quintero and lieutenant of a larger syndicate controlled from Guadalajara by the powerful drug-lord Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo. When the latter was unexpectedly arrested in April 1989, his Guadalajara Cartel collapsed into its regional components, Caro Payán retaining title to Tijuana's *plaza*—described by a contemporary analyst as "highly coveted by drug runners, because of its dense population of potential consumers on both sides of the border, and the high volume of cross-border traffic into which smugglers can blend."

When Caro Payán was briefly detained in Canada soon afterward, his position was usurped by Benjamín Arellano and his brothers Francisco Rafael, Ramón, and Francisco Javier, plus their uncle-by-marriage Labra Avilés; and when Caro Payán attempted to reassert his authority, he was repulsed and later assassinated in Guadalajara, leaving the Arellanos free to forge their own independent cartel. They quickly set about securing an unchallengeable grip on Tijuana through a series of assassinations, then vastly expanded their jurisdiction by claiming a territory extending 100 miles eastward as far as Mexicali, dispatching teams of gunmen to impose a "transit tax" upon any dealers who dared ship drugs across Baja California's northern border. Given their ruthlessness, the emergent organization would become known throughout Mexico as the "Arellanos' Cartel," rather than the "Tijuana Cartel."

This strong-arm Tijuanense seizure of all border-crossings into the United States was resented by other new groups along Mexico's Pacific coast, so that Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán—aggrieved at being denied his title to Tecate's *plaza*—in 1990 gathered lesser colleagues in Sonora and Sinaloa into a cooperative alliance or Federación, which would contest the Arellano claims and evolve into the rival "Sinaloa Cartel." Tensions and clashes between both trafficking syndicates gradually multiplied, until the impulsive and violent Ramón Arellano took a more active role, mounting various assassination-attempts in 1992 that climaxed with the mistaken murder of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, bishop of Guadalajara, on May 24, 1993. [For greater details, see "Arellano-Félix Organization: Clandestine Warfare and Fatal Blunder."]

An infuriated Mexican government offered a reward of 15 million new pesos—about $5 million—for information leading to the arrest of the main protagonists behind this ugly affair: Ramón, Francisco Javier, and Benjamín Arellano of the Tijuana Cartel, and "El Güero" Palma and "El Chapo" from the Sinaloa Cartel. A massive

manhunt began, with military and police units aggressively hunting for the perpetrators, so that Tijuana Cartel operations were considerably disrupted. El Chapo was soon captured, along with Francisco Rafael Arellano on December 4, 1993, both being sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The guilty Ramón Arellano remained hidden, it being rumored that the family eventually paid tens of millions of dollars in bribes to government officials at the highest levels, until their manhunt gradually eased. [For more information, see "Arellano-Félix Organization: Repercussions."]

Brutal Reign (1994–1999)

An unrepentant Ramón Arellano eventually resumed his cartel activities, with renewed vigor and ever-greater cruelty. Bolstered by steady imports of South American cocaine, the Tijuana Cartel prospered immensely throughout the late 1990s, its compact leadership under Benjamín "El Señor" Arellano developing a sophisticated structure with compartmentalized divisions to handle relations with Colombian suppliers, retail sales, employment of *sicarios*, recruitment of new elements, money laundering, etc. Major competitors such as the Gulf Cartel also became dislocated by the unexpected arrest of their leader Juan García Ábrego in January 1996, while Amado Carrillo Fuentes of the Juárez Cartel died suddenly while undergoing plastic surgery in July 1997, miring both syndicates in succession struggles.

Difficulties, Renewed War, and Leadership Losses (2000–2002)

But by 2000, the Arellanos' Colombian cocaine suppliers were having issues with the brothers, who despite their fearsome reputation were struggling to pay their debts promptly, so that the South Americans began redistributing loads among other more reliable traffickers. The reformist PAN President Vicente Fox ordered 2,000 newly-recruited *federales* into Tijuana early in 2001, although they would remain only a week or two—but subsequent police arrests did affect Arellano operations. And worse, El Chapo (recently escaped from prison) persuaded 25 fellow bosses in a series of high-level meetings held at Cuernavaca and in Mexico City as of October 2001 to join his new Federación, intended to make members' operations function more smoothly and to fight common enemies—so that when the Arellanos rebuffed this proposal, they were left alone and outnumbered against multiple foes.

Guzmán quickly attacked, supplementing his offensive with a stream of damaging tips into the new Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) in Mexico City, revealing details about the Tijuana Cartel's drug consignments, stash houses, weapons caches, money transfers, etc., which greatly debilitated the organization. Their weaknesses now became apparent:

- They manufactured few of the narcotics which they sold.
- Their claim to 100 miles of borderland was not only resented by other groups, but difficult to sustain, stretching their forces thin.
- Their failure to reach an accommodation with El Chapo's Federación was a strategic blunder, uniting all other members against them.

Beset on all sides and with their income slowly being strangled, the Arellanos were facing defeat by early next year, when the increasingly erratic Ramón Arellano—now deeply addicted to cocaine—drove a small

party of assassins into Mazatlán on February 10, 2002, in hopes of murdering El Chapo's partner Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada; but a chance encounter with state police ended in his death. One month later, Benjamín Arellano was also arrested in Puebla on March 9, 2002, so that the youngest brother, Francisco Javier "El Tigrillo" Arellano Félix, assumed command of the cartel.

Deterioration, Rupture, and Internal Warfare (2003–2010)

Yet with its best leader imprisoned and most intimidating enforcer dead, Arellano underbosses had to begin constricting operations so that their once-powerful organization might continue functioning on a reduced scale, even though others might grow at their expense. By 2005, the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR) would report that the Cártel Arellano Félix (CAF) had had its sphere-of-influence reduced to only 4 states, compared with 17 for the rising Sinaloa Cartel, and 21 for the Gulf Cartel and its fearsome Zeta enforcers. "El Tigrillo" Arellano was then apprehended by the U.S. Coast Guard while deep-sea fishing aboard the American-registered yacht *Dock Holliday* 15 miles off La Paz on August 16, 2006, his removal sparking a cartel restructuring, as lieutenants disputed its many other criminal enterprises beyond drug smuggling.

El Tigrillo's inexperienced 29-year-old nephew, Luis Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano, succeeded in command but soon found his conferred authority flouted by many veteran subordinates—most especially the hard-bitten security chief Eduardo Teodoro "El Teo" or "Tres Letras" García Simental. After more than a year of mounting defiance, a bloody shootout at dawn on April 26, 2008, left 15 *sicarios* dead in downtown Tijuana and the Arellano core at war with a large breakaway faction under García Simental—who sought an alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel, obliging a desperate Ingeniero to approach the hated Zetas. Amid all these distractions, the Sinaloans began sending large drug-loads through the now-undefended Arellano trafficking routes into California, while even the distant Familia Michoacana began making long-range incursions into the Tijuanenses' shrinking territory, hoping to secure their own direct access into the United States. [For greater details, see "Arellano-Félix Organization: Schism and Blood Feud."]

Lacking a steady source of income, García Simental's splinter group escalated their savage victimization of innocent civilians, ransoms allowing them to continue their struggle, while many citizens fled Tijuana during their sadistic reign-of-terror. Public opinion and government resolve finally began to turn against the vicious Teo, culminating with his arrest on January 2, 2010, so that Tijuana could enjoy an interlude of relative peace. The Arellano-Félix organization began to consolidate once again under El Ingeniero's leadership, although the victorious Sinaloa Cartel would retain primary control along most of Baja California's border-points, except for the Tijuanenses' stronghold.

Diminished Strength (2011–Present)

The shrunken and defeated Tijuana Cartel managed to recuperate and resume trafficking, although on a much-reduced scale. The last of the original Arellano Félix brothers, Eduardo, was extradited to the United States in December 2012 and sentenced to 15 years in prison by August 2013. The eldest, Francisco Rafael, was assassinated on October 18, 2013—six days short of his

64th birthday—even though he had never been a major player. And his nephew Luis Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano was arrested by soldiers and PGR agents at 4:00 p.m. on June 23, 2014, while watching a soccer match in a Carl's Jr. restaurant, leaving only his mother, Enedina, in charge of the cartel.

Still, a report from early 2015 indicated that the Tijuana Cartel was attempting to retake some territory from the Sinaloans, and expanding its presence abroad. Following El Chapo's final arrest in 2016, evidence emerged that the Tijuana Cartel remnants had formed an alliance with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, to challenge the Sinaloans' hegemony in Baja California—and despite the capture of several top members, still retained significant control over their border stronghold and its immediate area.

See also: Arellano-Félix Organization; Cardinal Posadas Murder; Tunnels.

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Tunnels

Tunnels. Effective technique employed by cartels to smuggle drugs into the United States, as well as a defensive measure to evade capture or escape confinement.

Background: Challenges of Tunneling

During the drug trade's earliest days, small-time amateur tunnelers would excavate short, shallow openings under a remote section of border fencing—unsophisticated efforts derisively dubbed "gopher holes" by American customs-agents—so as to hastily pass through some illicit materials before their handiwork was discovered. For the ambitious few who attempted deeper excavations, the perils of underground mining soon became apparent: aside from unexpected subterranean obstacles such as rock faces, variants in soil consistency could also result in dangerous cave-ins or sudden flooding, while heavy manual labor within such confined spaces underground quickly consumed all the breathable air. It would be Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán who would first invest significant funds in contracting professional engineers and purchasing the necessary equipment to overcome such difficulties.

El Chapo's First Narco-Tunnel (1987)

Within a couple of years of having started their syndicate, Guzmán convinced his partners Adrián Gómez González and Héctor "El Güero" Palma to finance the construction of a tunnel by the trained architect and engineer Felipe de Jesús Corona Verbera, a 1980 graduate from the University of Guadalajara. Since their fledgling organization had only limited access to the United States along a narrow stretch of Arizona's border, this first so-called *narcotúnel* originated from a luxury house purchased by Rafael Francisco Camarena Macías—El Chapo's attorney—in northeastern Sonora's border-town of Agua Prieta. At an approximate cost of $1.5 million, Corona designed and drove a sophisticated 200-foot tunnel 30 feet underground, its access cleverly concealed inside the house beneath a concrete slab topped with a billiard table, which could only be elevated with hydraulic jacks—activated by turning on a water spigot attached to the building's exterior. The 5-foot-high, concrete-lined tunnel was

an engineering marvel equipped with electrical lighting and sockets, compressed air and pulley systems, side rooms that could stockpile up to five tons of cocaine, a mine cart, and even a pump for removing excess water.

It emerged opposite in Douglas, Arizona, beneath the Douglas Warehouse's trailer wash-bay's steel drain-grate, on a lot which Camarena had also bought so that Corona might custom-build its exit, allowing cargoes to be slipped up from beneath and directly into freshly-washed trucks for immediate departure. This tunnel would prove ideal for smuggling marijuana, whose bulky and redolent cargoes were otherwise difficult to slip past U.S. customs, but most especially for compact bundles of much more profitable Colombian cocaine. According to a former Sinaloa Cartel member who would be questioned a few years later by American prosecutors, a delighted Guzmán had said to some colleagues upon its completion in October 1987: "The architect Corona has made me a fine f— tunnel," instructing them to ask their South American suppliers "to send all the drugs that they can." Unaware of this *narcotúnel*'s existence, the Colombians were astonished at how quickly Guzmán could deliver their loads into the United States and bring back millions in proceeds, joking that his nickname should be *El Rápido* or the "Fast One" instead of El Chapo.

Such prowess would allow Guzmán to attract more consignments and negotiate higher fees, which the Colombians gladly paid, fueling an upsurge in his syndicate's wealth and power. Eventually, thanks to a tip, U.S. Customs agents would set up surveillance on Douglas Warehouse in early May 1990, tailing an emerging flatbed truck to its destination at a farmhouse complex in Queen Creek, a rural town southeast of Phoenix. The agents kept watch for two days, noting flashes emanating from one structure, which they believed were caused by welding or cutting with a blowtorch. After obtaining a search warrant, they raided this complex on May 11, 1990, uncovering a false compartment fitted beneath the truck bed, as well as 2,037 pounds of Colombian cocaine stacked in boxes in a nearby building.

Because of such a sizable seizure, the agents executed a second search-warrant at Douglas Warehouse on May 17, 1990, eventually locating the steel drainage-grate in its floor covering a hatch disguised as a concrete slab. Unable to open it manually, the agents used a jackhammer to break through and found a shaft underneath that connected to El Chapo's tunnel. By this time, its excavation had already paid for itself many times over, and his new Sinaloa Cartel was developing its subterranean capabilities by digging numerous similar narco-tunnels as its territory expanded along the border. Years later, former DEA Chief of International Operations, Michael S. Vigil would opine:

> *I would say a normal tunnel will run anywhere from—depending on its length and complexity—$1 million to maybe $3 million. And the fact of the matter is that once you run one or two loads, that tunnel is paid for; so is it worth it to them? Without question.*

The original 1987 tunnel is used today as a training facility for U.S. Border Patrol agents.

Rival Tunnels (1993–2015)

As the tunneling pioneer, Guzmán and his engineers would lead in the construction of *narcotúnels* during the early 1990s, although other major organizations soon learned the secret of his success, and

wealthy competitors such as the Tijuana Cartel began driving their own—taking advantage of the nearby Otay Mesa, a plateau sitting between Tijuana and San Diego atop subsoil that is "made of clay called bentonite that is self-supporting and as workable as wax." Their miners could dig down to this layer, which is firm enough so that walls can stand without wood or concrete reinforcement, thus reducing the expense of time-consuming bracing. Given that this district was entering a construction boom during which the number of warehouses in Otay Mesa almost quadrupled (an expansion matched in Garita de Otay, an industrial area in the northern part of Tijuana), this constant movement of forklifts, jackhammers, and heavy vehicles provided ample cover for extracting large amounts of underground soil, eventually honeycombing this area with tunnels. Emerging near the official border-entry for commercial vehicles entering the United States, cartel affiliates could simply back their trucks into loading bays, load smuggled pallets, and depart unimpeded onto California's freeways to make their deliveries.

As early as late May 1993, Policía Federal agents hunting for criminal fugitives in the wake of Cardinal Posadas' murder in Guadalajara found an unfinished 1,416-foot-long, 65-foot-deep tunnel traversing the Otay Mesa from Tijuana, stopping just 120 feet short of its intended destination: an incomplete cannery in San Diego financed by José, Antonio, and Jesús Reynoso, executives of the Reynoso Brothers' Tía Anita food company of City of Industry. Contemporary law-enforcement sources and news media would attribute this project to El Chapo, the best-known tunnel-boss, although—given the bloody war that he was fighting against the Arellano family—it is difficult to imagine how such trespassing could be tolerated in their territory. Since one of the Reynoso brothers subsequently absconded to live in Tijuana, brashly erecting a huge narco-mansion within plain view of U.S. border patrols, it is more likely that this particular tunnel enjoyed Tijuana Cartel support.

Less than a decade later, American police acting on a tip searched a farm east of San Diego and discovered a safe hidden beneath its stairs. Breaking it open, they found it empty and were about to move on, when someone noticed that the safe floor seemed a bit too high. Its false bottom concealed a shaft descending to a 1,200-foot tunnel—complete with electric lights and rails—that extended all the way into the border-town of Tecate, Baja California, through which the Arellanos were known to have run hundreds of millions of dollars in drugs. Next year, a second such tunnel was found west of the San Ysidro Port of Entry; a third in 2004; while U.S. Border Patrol agents investigating a caved-in road in January 2006 discovered a fourth.

Yet tightened American border-security aboveground following the September 11, 2001, terror attacks had made tunneling even more profitable. Lesser groups—unable to invest so much money and time into an underground project, which U.S. analysts calculated "can take nine months or more to build the typical drug-tunnel"—found ways for economizing by seeking out the most favorable terrain possible and aiming their digs across shorter distances, often emerging in existing underground networks such as civic drainage-systems, so as to disappear into their maze of waterways once on the American side. In 2015, smugglers would be caught transporting drugs from Mexicali through a tunnel that was partially underwater, ending at the All-American

Canal—where they would drop in their drug bundles to be retrieved by divers.

And even more ruthless cost-cutting expedients would be resorted to by such predatory groups as the Zetas, who often enticed poor young migrants with work offers, only to lock them in warehouses and compel these forced laborers to dig in shifts, being held hostage for months until they completed their task. At that point, they would sometimes get paid off, other times not—instead being murdered, both to save money, as well as to take the secret of the tunnel's existence to the grave.

El Chapo's Escape Outlets (2001–2016)

In addition to narco-tunnels for smuggling, a protected witness testified during the March 2006 trial of Guzmán's architect, Corona, how this defendant had also "built other structures for El Chapo and had previously used hydraulic systems to design hidden underground *clavos* or 'stashes'" for the numerous residences that he had custom-built so as to conceal money, weapons, and other illicit goods. And following his escape from five years' incarceration in Puente Grande penitentiary in January 2001, the drug lord also insisted on cleverly-concealed exits from his safe houses, reflecting his fear of being retaken. ["El Chapo" Guzmán always insisted on having *palapas* included on his residential grounds, too, traditional open-air gazebos featuring a round floor and bare wooden frame topped with a thatched roof, so as to hold private talks outdoors—reassured that he could see all around and verify no one was eavesdropping, plus knowing that no electronic listening-devices could be easily concealed within its bare structure.]

Corona having been captured by the Mexican authorities on January 23, 2003, and extradited to the United States two months later, the cartel boss soon retained another tunnel mastermind: José Sánchez Villalobos, an adept project-manager who could coordinate multiple construction jobs (including one huge 2,200-foot tunnel), while also creating cunningly camouflaged hatches for quick residential escapes—especially in such Sinaloan cities as Culiacán, Los Mochis, and Mazatlán, where El Chapo's influence ensured that no building inspector would ever know about these secret passageways.

Even after Sánchez Villalobos was arrested in early 2012 in Guadalajara, his handiwork would save his patron on more than one occasion: in mid-February 2014, naval special-forces stormed the home of Guzmán's ex-wife Griselda Pérez López at 642 Cerro de las Siete Gotas Street in Culiacán, and they would have caught the elusive drug-lord but for being briefly checked by its steel-reinforced front door—which afforded El Chapo sufficient time to disappear into a complex maze of seven tunnels that connected to a like number of residences nearby, so that the drug boss could emerge at any one at random and be picked up by a bodyguard awaiting him with a car.

A follow-up raid on a second safe-house on Enrique Colunga Street at dawn on February 17, 2014, likewise failed to catch Guzmán, although it did lead the *marinos* to a third residence on nearby Constituyente Emiliano García Street, which they found empty—although a closer examination showed that both dwellings had been fitted with shrewdly hidden hatches beneath their bathtubs, which could be tilted upward and provide rapid means of egress. Even when El Chapo was apprehended for the third and final time two years later, he was almost saved by yet another escape tunnel custom-fitted into his safe house at Boulevard Jiquilpan 1002 in Los Mochis, Sinaloa.

A 17-man Navy special-forces unit fought its way inside before dawn on January 8, 2016, and subdued the drug lord's six *sicario* gunmen, but Guzmán himself was nowhere to be found. It would take this strike force an hour and a half before resorting to tearing down a false mirrored wall with crowbars to reveal a concrete-lined tunnel leading hundreds of feet directly into a junction with the city's storm-drains. Clad only in their underwear, El Chapo and his regional sub-boss Orso Iván "El Cholo" Gastélum Cruz had crawled away into the three-foot-high drains on their hands and knees, vanishing into the darkness. As daylight broke, though, it began to rain aboveground and Los Mochis' storm drains started filling with water, so that a begrimed Guzmán and his lone companion emerged from their hiding place a mile away around 7:00 a.m.; yet despite commandeering a car and driving off toward Guasave and Navojoa, the exhausted pair were intercepted by a highway police-cruiser and arrested without any further resistance.

El Chapo's Grand Escape-Tunnel (July 2015)

The most remarkable engineering feat devised and subsidized by El Chapo was the mile-long tunnel stealthily driven beneath the walls of Altiplano Penitentiary, after he had been reincarcerated in that maximum-security facility in late February 2014. Experts such as the DEA's Michael Vigil had already acknowledged that his Sinaloa Cartel employed "tremendous mining engineers that know their business," and estimated this underground project had probably cost the kingpin $5 million or more (including the expense of sending his engineering team for three months' advanced study in underground technology in Germany), and may have taken as long as a year to complete. The dig itself—personally supervised by Guzmán's sons—originated from an isolated, nondescript construction-site in the far distance enclosed behind high walls, from which dump trucks could extract large quantities of soil and rock without arousing suspicion. Having sited their tunnel entrance with GPS precision, a smart watch was smuggled into El Chapo to pinpoint its exit point underneath his cell, the engineers then using "adjustment lasers" to unerringly excavate a 5.5-foot-high subterranean adit for more than a mile, complete with overhead lighting and a ventilation system made of PVC pipes.

This tunnel emerged precisely at a 1.5-by-1.5-foot spot directly beneath the shower floor in his cell. Closed-circuit surveillance footage would show Guzmán lying on his bunk on the evening of Saturday, July 11, 2015, watching a loudly-blaring portable television—the weekend having been chosen, as fewer guards would be on duty. At 8:46 p.m., drilling sounds can be heard, then a series of "blows of metal on concrete," before the drug lord walked over into his adjoining shower-stall at 8:52 p.m. and crouched down out of sight behind its low partition. No one in the prison control-room would verify his physical presence until 9:17 p.m., when guards were dispatched to investigate; it would take another three hours for prison officials to activate a "code red" lockdown and alert the outside authorities.

The Sinaloa Cartel chief had meanwhile dropped through the hole and climbed down a 32-foot ladder to meet the mile-long tunnel, hopping on a custom-built, two-cart sled rigged with a motorcycle to speed away to freedom. Upon exiting, he had immediately been taken to a nearby warehouse to change clothing, then flown in a small plane

to San Juan del Río, Querétaro, before proceeding on to his Sinaloan La Tuna mountain-retreat. More than 30 prison officials and guards would be subsequently arrested on suspicion of aiding El Chapo's escape, including two ex-Altiplano directors and the former head of Mexico's federal prison system.

Modern Tunneling (2015–Present)

Although exact statistics remain uncorroborated and the number of "narco-tunnels" can vary wildly on either side of the border, it is believed that some 224 were uncovered between 1990 and March 2016, of which 185 were actually completed and emerged in American territory. Since there is no technology available for detecting an underground dig, for every tunnel found by the authorities, about ten or more go undetected—because while equipment might exist that can measure earth density, sandy or loose subsoil will produce false readings. The ground around Otay Mesa, for example, has proven especially impenetrable to detection methods because deep-seated geophysical variants such as rock seams or mismatched strata will show up as indistinct lines on the screens of ground-penetrating radar, and investigating every suspicious blip is not cost-effective.

Sometimes *narcotúnels* will cave in or be identified while under construction, but the only truly effective way of finding operational ones is through informants who know where they are located, or detecting suspect activities on the surface. Even then, when openings are well concealed and seldom used, very specific information is required to uncover the tunnel without tearing the building apart, exceeding the limitations of any court order. And traffickers are very crafty at positioning and disguising their handiwork, such as the tunnel discovered in 2011 hidden beneath a lonely structure on the very edge of the Tijuana International Airport runway, where jet planes regularly take off; another found in that same city in April 2015, built near a Mexican Air Force base and regional Federal Police facility; or a third a year later, whose access point was an elevator fitted into a closet in a Tijuana home.

For those cross-border criminal associations that still command vast incomes and are undaunted by the time-consuming expense of constructing "narco-tunnels," the latest technology has greatly facilitated their efforts—such as Total Station, state-of-the-art surveying instruments and bores used by professional drilling-companies for subterranean work. Outfitted with a laser and crystal prism ("because when you're underground a GPS unit will not work"), Total Station shoots out a beam to instantly provide accurate measurements, permitting adits to be driven for quite a distance underground with "a six- to eight-inch variable." Authorities have even come across sophisticated equipment used by gas companies—including "horizontal-directional" drilling machines, used commercially to lay underground pipelines—in cartel hands, an expert noting in early 2014:

> *With some training, a single operator can drill a thousand-foot tunnel, burrowing at any angle, in a matter of weeks. The most advanced* [horizontal-directional drilling machines] *monitor your progress in real time, while a self-feeding system automatically lays pipe. The biggest industrial rigs can drill holes five feet in diameter, wide enough for a human.*

As a result, seizures continue such as the traffic stop made in San Luis, Arizona, on the evening of August 13, 2018, when a police K-9 unit alerted officers to two toolboxes in a trailer towed behind the pickup of Yuma resident Jesús Iván López

García—which upon closer examination were found to contain 261 pounds of methamphetamines, 14 pounds of cocaine, 30 pounds of heroin, and nearly 7 pounds of fentanyl with a total estimated street-value of $1.1 million. Having been seen removing these containers earlier that same day from an abandoned Kentucky Fried Chicken fast-food restaurant that he had recently purchased at 552 San Luis Plaza Drive, that vacant building was inspected and a narco-tunnel located in its kitchen, running beneath the border into the town of San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora. After informing their Mexican counterparts, soldiers located this tunnel's other end on August 17, 2018, in the bedroom of a house under construction. A 750-foot tunnel ran in between, 60 feet deep and described by a Mexican Army spokesman as "perfectly built"—with ventilation and electric-lighting systems, plus walls and ceiling braced with wood, as well as small carts for hauling loads. And inside this unfinished residence, images of Santa Muerte and Jesús Malverde, patron saints of drug traffickers, were hanging from the wall for additional spiritual protection.

Huachicolero Tunnel (2018)

An even humbler instance of criminal tunneling was revealed on June 21, 2018, when Policía Federal agents—acting on intelligence received by that force's División de Investigación or "Investigative Division" from a citizen concerned by a heavily-armed man seen emerging from a suspicious-looking building in the San Cristóbal Huichochitlán neighborhood of Toluca, in the State of Mexico—raided that address and found a 130-foot tunnel had been dug to tap into a Pemex gasoline-duct underground, attaching hoses which allowed large quantities of refined fuels to be siphoned off and sold on the black market.

See also: Altiplano Prison; Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"; Jesús Malverde; Santa Muerte.

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U–V

Support, gentlemen, support! We have a confrontation, gentlemen. Support here in Tingüindín, in the K-5 mountain range. Support! We have wounded comrades. Support, f— mothers, support!

—call from a state police patrol engaged against cartel gunmen in Tacátzcuaro, Michoacán (February 2018)

UEDO (1996–2003). Unidad Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Organized-Crime Unit," a *Subprocuraduría* or "Assistant Prosecutor's Office" created to support civilian victims whose cases were before the Procuraduría General de la República or "Attorney-General's Office for the Republic" (PGR)—the ministry that directs national police-actions and conducts most legal prosecutions throughout Mexico.

Creation and Checkered History (1996–2003)

As part of a series of police reforms aimed at enhancing their tarnished reputation and better combating crime, Mexico's Congress had issued a *Ley Federal contra Delincuencia Organizada* or "Federal Law against Organized Crime" on November 7, 1996, which went into effect that following month and:

- broadened the penalties against criminal associations;
- expanded wiretapping permits;
- created a witness-protection program;
- and facilitated the confiscation of criminal proceeds [much like RICO laws did in the United States].

A central UEDO headquarters was consequently established to provide public assistance in Mexico City, with satellite directorates that dealt specifically with:

- Asalto y Robo de Vehículos or "Robberies and Automotive Thefts"
- Control de Procesos Penales y Amparos or "Oversight of Sentencing and Pardons"
- Apoyo Jurídico y Control Ministerial or "Judicial Support and Ministerial Oversight"
- Terrorismo, Acopio y Tráfico de Armas or "Terrorism and Arms-Trafficking"
- Delitos Contra la Salud or "Crimes against Public Health" (i.e., drug selling)
- Falsificación o Alteración de Moneda or "Counterfeiting Currency"
- Secuestros or "Kidnappings"
- Tráfico de Menores or "Human-Trafficking of Minors"

It would be UEDO's director and "top anti-drug prosecutor," José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, who would disabuse reporters during a Mexico City press conference in the summer of 2001 of the rumored existence of a "Monterrey Cartel"—a fictional

new syndicate invented by Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, so as to distract the authorities from his own illegal activities in neighboring Tamaulipas. Santiago Vasconcelos also disclosed on December 14, 2001, how the emergent Zetas paramilitary group had recruited six Army deserters from the 104th GAFE Company communication and intelligence-gathering detachments into their ranks, thereby greatly enhancing that group's capabilities. While an anonymous tip phoned by an irate neighbor to the UEDO station at Matamoros—rather than the unreliable city police—on the evening of November 21, 2002, brought a party of soldiers and agents to an address on Herrera Street where they cornered and killed the Zeta commander Arturo (Z-1) Guzmán Decena [for greater details, see "Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Death"].

Dissolution (2003)

Following the election of PAN reformist Vicente Fox as Mexico's new president in December 2000, an assessment and overhaul of all federal institutions began, so that his attorney-general, Rafael Macedo de la Concha, could announce by late January 2003 in Monterrey how UEDO—with130 of its agents already arrested and another 1,400 under investigation—would be dissolved along with the competing FEADS within the next six months, and replaced in their duties by the newly-created Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI).

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel; FEADS; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Death.

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UNAPROP (2013–Present).

Unidades Navales de Protección Portuaria or "Naval Port-Protection Units," assigned as extra security to resist international smugglers infiltrating maritime commerce.

According to a directive published in the *Diario oficial* on December 26, 2013, the *Secretario de Marina como Alto Mando de la Armada de México* or "Naval Secretary as Commander-in-Chief of Mexico's War-Fleet" had been instructed by President Enrique Peña Nieto to enhance "maritime and port protections" through deployment of such units. The command to actually begin implementing these measures was issued from Mexico City on March 15, 2014, becoming effective as of April 1 when UNAPROPs were to be on station at:

- Ensenada and La Paz, Baja California
- Guaymas, Sonora
- Mazatlán, Sinaloa
- Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco
- Manzanillo, Colima
- Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán
- Acapulco, Guerrero
- Salina Cruz, Oaxaca
- Puerto Chiapas, Chiapas
- Puerto Matamoros, Altamira, and Tampico, Tamaulipas
- Tuxpan, city of Veracruz, and Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz
- Dos Bocas, Tabasco
- Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche
- Progreso, Yucatán

Their mission was to conduct "monitoring, inspection, and control functions as Maritime Police within the port premises, and to exercise authority in maritime port security"—most especially in customs offices and bonded warehouses—under the commander of each respective naval zone. Such patrols against large-scale drug imports and exports would not only prove to be unending, but also dangerous: almost exactly one year later on March 4, 2015, Rear Admiral José Luis Corro Chávez—port-captain at Lázaro Cárdenas—was shot and killed outside his home, allegedly for interfering with the Knights Templar Cartel's traffic.

As recently as October 11, 2018, the *Yucatán Times* reported that "Port Security Naval Protection Unit 51 (Unaprop-51)" had rescued the yacht *Sibarita*, after its engine died and it was in danger of dashing onto the Yucalpetén breakwater because of high winds from Tropical Storm Michael.

See also: Infantería de Marina; Familia Michoacana Cartel: Reincarnation as Knights Templar.

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Unión Tepito, Cártel de la (2008–2018). Self-proclaimed "cartel," although actually just a street-gang operating in certain sectors of Mexico City.

This group was founded in 2008, when a 13-year veteran Policía Judicial Federal or "Federal Judicial Police" (PJF) officer, Ricardo "El Moco" López Castillo, was revealed to be connected to the Zeta Cartel, and therefore deserted to instead join the brothers Francisco Javier "Pancho Cayagua" Hernández Gómez and Armando "El Ostión Cayagua" Hernández Gómez—gang leaders in Mexico's impoverished and crime-ridden Tepito district—to begin a protection racket charging weekly fees from businessmen, enforced by young thugs on motorcycles. This small gang then graduated into drug sales in bars and nightclubs, eventually splitting into two factions as of 2013, after the elimination of a sub-cell known as Los Malandros in the Zona Rosa tourist district: one splinter group being called La Unión Insurgentes under Jesús "El Chucho" Carmona (who retained control over the Zona Rosa drug-trade, as well as Colonias Condesa, Roma, and Del Valle) and La Unión Tepito under original founder "Pancho Cayagua" Hernández, which still controlled drug traffic in Polanco, Barrio Bravo, Iztapalapa, and Gustavo A. Madero. Multiple homicides of street dealers ensued, as both groups imposed their authority within their respective territories.

Then Pancho Cayagua was murdered in October 2015, reputedly with the connivance of his lieutenant Roberto "El Betito" Moyado Esparza, whose assumption of command over La Unión Tepito was resented and set off a fresh round of internal violence. El Moco himself was arrested in Naucalpan on May 8, 2018, and incarcerated in the Reclusorio Norte on numerous charges. The leader of La Unión Tepito's *sicarios*—Juan Iván "La Pulga" Arenas Reyes—was assassinated at dawn on Saturday June 9, 2018, while being driven down Insurgentes Avenue in a black pickup, which was overtaken by a Volkswagen Amarok pickup bearing a hit squad of rival gunmen. Finally, the treasonous "El Betito" Moyado

was arrested on August 10, 2018, despite having altered his appearance by losing 70 pounds and receiving hair-implants, in a vain attempt to avoid being recognized.

See also: Derecho de piso; Zeta Cartel (2010–2014).

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Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie" (1973–Present).

American-born trafficker who rose high in cartel ranks, before being arrested and condemned to a lengthy prison term in the United States.

Birth and Early Misdeeds (1973–1997)

He had been born on August 11, 1973, the fifth of eight children who would be raised by hardworking parents named Abel Valdez and Ofelina Villarreal in a middle-class subdivision of Laredo, Texas. [Edgar's eldest brother, Abel, would later become a probation officer; his sister Carla a state assistant district-attorney.] The strong and wild-spirited teenager played junior-varsity football as an inside linebacker with the number "50" for the United High School Longhorns in 1991, around the same time that he began selling his first few dime-bags of marijuana to earn some money. At age 18, two months before graduation, he was arrested for negligent homicide stemming from a 1992 traffic accident, during which he crashed into the car of a middle-school counselor with his red-and-gold Chevrolet pickup, but ultimately did not face any criminal charges. He barely graduated high school and did not attend college, supposedly to try his hand at animal husbandry.

Two years later, the 20-year-old Edgar was arrested again in Springfield, Missouri, this time on a warrant issued out of New Orleans after some of his colleagues had been detained in Saint Louis with 80 pounds of marijuana, which they said belonged to him. Sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, this punishment was suspended, Valdez being placed on five years' probation. The year that he turned 21, one of his sisters won $1 million in the Texas Lottery, so that his family began planning to move and Edgar married his high-school girlfriend, Virginia Pérez. He was then arrested once more at the age of 22 for driving at a very high speed while drunk—a charge which was reduced to public intoxication, so that he escaped with only paying a fine. His stable family, the excellent reputation enjoyed by his parents and siblings, and his recent marriage contributed toward this rebellious young man's numerous "second chances."

Flight into Mexico and Introduction to Drug Smuggling (1998–2001)

Two and a half years afterward—now 24 years of age—Edgar Valdez was charged in Laredo along with a dozen members of his crew, after a planted informant revealed that they were shipping a load of 700 pounds of marijuana to San Antonio and 133 pounds to Saint Louis. A federal indictment for "possession with intent to distribute" was drawn up, yet La Barbie fled across the river into Nuevo Laredo that same year of 1998, where he used his past association with a nephew of Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez to join the latter's operation as an independent dealer—buying cocaine from him and paying $60,000 a month for a "*piso*" permit. Legend has it that the young Texan initially proved so uncontrollable that El Chacho at one point wanted to have him killed for

imperiling the uneasy truce with the powerful Gulf Cartel, headed out of Matamoros by the aggressive Osiel Cárdenas Guillén.

Valdez was soon profiting from his first drug-exports to Dallas and began a rapid ascent through the trafficking underworld, being a significant 27-year-old dealer with distributors in New Orleans and Memphis by 2000—obtaining his cocaine through Tapachula, Chiapas, from Sergio "El Grande" Villarreal Barragán and building his own cross-border smuggling network with a truck company that he cofounded with Carlos Montemayor as a front. Next year, La Barbie was sending 20–30 kilo shipments every three or four weeks into the United States, which increased to 60–80 kilograms and ultimately 150–180 kilo consignments.

In September 2001, U.S. federal agents caught a brief but revealing glimpse into La Barbie's activities: the previous month, he had agreed to meet a new distributor for one of his American markets, who visited him at one of his Nuevo Laredo homes. Valdez appeared with several armed bodyguards in a three-vehicle caravan, including a Chevy Suburban and an extended-cab pickup, his own vehicle being equipped with police lights and sirens. They moved on to a larger mansion, which featured gun-ports as well as more heavily-armed men (some of whom appeared to be police officers). During the subsequent meeting, Valdez stated that he had 80 kilos of cocaine in the house and was expecting another 250 kilos and firearms next day from his Colombian suppliers—warning the prospect not to cross him, because he knew many people in high places and was paying a lot of money to informants. To ensure compliance, Valdez required the distributor to tell him in detail about where he lived before agreeing to do business.

That same year, Valdez staged a similar show for two more potential distributors from Memphis, having them picked up as they entered Mexico by local policemen on his payroll, who drove them in their squad-cars into his presence. One of these visitors, Craig Petties, ultimately became Valdez's gateway into the Tennessee market, receiving shipments every three or four weeks of 50–60 kilos packed in crates delivered by tractor-trailers—which would then be emptied and repacked with cash (roughly $1 million per trip), to be transported back to Mexico.

Cartel War and Retreat (Spring–Summer 2002)

By 2002, Valdez had built up a successful trafficking-operation out of Nuevo Laredo, further establishing a relationship with the head of one of the border-crossing *plazas* leading into Laredo, Texas, enabling him to more easily trans-ship his loads—and although he continued to obtain his cocaine from various sources in Mexico, he dispatched a lieutenant to Colombia in hopes of developing a direct source. To his organization's members, Valdez remained known by his high-school nickname of "La Barbie," in reference to his fair complexion and coloring. His operation was also becoming highly lucrative, allowing Valdez to purchase legitimate businesses and valuable real-estate—such as two ranches in Nuevo Laredo's municipality, one of which encompassed 40–50 acres and had a mini-zoo featuring a lion and other animals—as well as erecting various luxury homes.

However, early that same year of 2002, the Gulf Cartel dispatched its lethal new paramilitary force—the Zetas—to win control over Nuevo Laredo and its drug corridors. Violence skyrocketed, with people being killed or disappearing; Zeta

hit-squads even seized the riverside *plaza* opposite the one controlled by Valdez and killed its boss. When La Barbie balked at paying Cárdenas' inflated prices for cocaine and then "stiffed the Gulf Cartel on the [*piso*] tax for a ton of cocaine that they had fronted him," the Zetas were unleashed against him. They burned multiple residences owned by Valdez, even killing the animals in his zoo. Faced with a stalled business and mounting safety concerns, he evacuated Nuevo Laredo and tried to continue operating from Monterrey, engaging in sporadic clashes in hopes of reclaiming some measure of access through the Laredo corridor. But his trafficking business was not as profitable from distant Monterrey, so that money became tighter, although La Barbie managed to cement a relationship with a former Nuevo León Policía Judicial or state "Judicial Police" officer named Jaime "El Güero" Valdez Martínez, providing him with the necessary funds to pay off local police and avoid any interference with his syndicate.

Sinaloa Cartel Affiliation (Autumn 2002–Autumn 2003)

Valdez also used this corrupt ex-policeman for an introduction to Arturo Beltrán Leyva, the security commander temporarily based in Mexico City for Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's newly-created Federación (which secretly intended to win back Nuevo Laredo). The exiled dealer and Beltrán hit it off during their initial meeting in the national capital, La Barbie sealing this bond when he learned that the enforcer owned a fine estate with stables but no horses—which Valdez rectified by buying him two prize mounts and sending these along with a trainer, who stayed with Beltrán for several days to teach him equestrian techniques. Delighted at finding such an ideal recruit for his forthcoming campaign, the Sinaloan underboss invited Valdez to do business with him directly, so that the 29-year-old shifted his base-of-operations from Monterrey to Mexico City during the fall of 2002, holding repeated meetings with Beltrán in the capital, as well as Acapulco and on his private ranch at Ixtapa de la Sal.

According to federal police-file PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS/106/2005, Beltrán also chose La Barbie early next year for the delicate task of bribing Domingo González Díaz, director of the High Command of the corrupt Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) with roughly $1 million in March 2003, to protect the Sinaloa Cartel's interests in Nuevo Laredo by sending a confidant to command that city's federal-police forces—with secret instructions to furnish protection to the Sinaloans and help them against their rivals. While successfully transacting this subornment, Valdez also met on multiple occasions with "El Chapo" Guzmán himself, who welcomed him into La Federación.

By this time, La Barbie was once again shipping 150–180-kilo loads of cocaine to Memphis, and he even sent an associate back to Colombia in hopes of securing a steadier supply. An uneasy truce now simmered around Nuevo Laredo, so that Valdez almost brokered his own separate deal allowing him to move consignments through that corridor again, so long as he paid the requisite "transit fees" to the Gulf Cartel—an agreement that collapsed after its leader, Osiel Cárdenas, was arrested by Army special-forces on March 14, 2003. Shortly thereafter, La Barbie proposed to a variety of bosses excluded from Nuevo Laredo—Armando Valencia Cornelio of the Milenio Cartel; Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel

Villarreal, and Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno of La Federación—his plan to spearhead a covert campaign aimed at loosening the occupiers' grip over that disputed border-city, while they were seemingly weakened and distracted elsewhere.

Armando Valencia promptly accepted and began providing financial support for Valdez's attempt, giving his undercover Milenio representative $150,000 to rent "15 or 20 [furnished] residences in Nuevo Laredo, because they are going to fight for its *plaza*, and intended to insert 200 men under his command." Preparations would be set back when Armando Valencia was arrested near Guadalajara on August 15, 2003, in a coordinated strike that also swept up seven other *milenio* underbosses who had been commanding the Valencias' *sicarios* around Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa. Despite being rattled by the loss of their longtime figurehead and front-line commanders, the Milenio leaders continued supporting Valdez's stealthy infiltration-plan; however, even with more direct involvement from the Sinaloa Cartel's formidable Arturo Beltrán, it would take the remainder of that fall of 2003 to fully man the clandestine hideouts rented throughout Nuevo Laredo with 200 hired ex-policemen and Sinaloa gunmen, in teams of 10 to 15 *sicarios* apiece.

Offensives to Reclaim Nuevo Laredo (2004–2005)

Emulating the Zetas' will-of-the-wisp tactics, La Barbie's shadowy campaign began early in 2004, as his infiltrators started emerging from their hideaways at night—many of them disguised in government-issue uniforms, Valdez himself wearing one on occasion—as well as bribing commanders of local law-enforcement units to commingle with their forces. His lieutenants included his brother Armando; his *sicario* commander, Gamaliel "El Güero Huetamo" Aguirre Tavira; recently-deserted GAFE Lieutenant Manuel Alejandro Aponte Gómez; José Luis "El Tubi" Carrizales Maldonado; a former Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) captain, Carlos Esquivel Maldonado; La Barbie's old Nuevo León Judicial Police contact, "El Güero" Valdez; as well as the veteran *chacho* Lucio "El Sol" Martínez Manríquez. Such subterfuges allowed them to rob or abduct midlevel Gulf Cartel distributors and money couriers, as well as raid stash houses and intercept consignments, all designed to deplete their enemies' resources.

Once the Gulf Cartel leadership realized that its rising losses in Nuevo Laredo were due to an orchestrated campaign, they dispatched their Zeta paramilitary force to bolster its defenses, as well as appointing the locally born ex-car thief Iván "El Talibán" Velazquez Caballero as Nuevo Laredo's *plaza* boss. The hardhearted Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano was the Zetas' field-commander, seconded by the Gulf Cartel lieutenant Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales—who would conduct himself with sadistic malice, compensating for the fact that he was not an ex-military man with a prestigious "Zeta" code-number, but only a second-tier "Cobra." One of his bodyguards would later turn government informant and describe how Treviño's days were:

> *. . . dedicated almost exclusively to abductions* [levantones]. *He is very bloodthirsty, very given to killing people, whose remains would be "cooked" by* cocineros *in an empty warehouse, located between the kilometer 10 and 14 markers on the road from Nuevo Laredo toward Reynosa. Only drums and diesel-fuel were ever allowed to be stored there.*

Gangland killings and bloodshed became commonplace as this low-grade warfare

smoldered on into that summer, and although the number of recorded murders in Nuevo Laredo jumped from 50 in 2004 to 158 by the autumn of 2005—without counting many "disappearances"—neither side's efforts were sufficient to defeat their opponents or make any significant territorial gains. La Barbie consequently assembled, with help from Arturo Beltrán and the Sinaloa Cartel, a small paramilitary army of 500 *sicarios* nicknamed "Los Negros" to launch a full-bore onslaught. First, though, he eccentrically paid for a full-page spread in *El Norte de Monterrey* newspaper on September 2, 2004, describing himself as an "entrepreneur" calling on President Vicente Fox to resolve "the insecurity, extortion, and terror" gripping Nuevo Laredo because of its Zeta occupation.

Ironically, nine days later Valdez's security-detail would carry out the assassination of Rodolfo "El Niño de Oro" Carrillo in Culiacán on behalf of his Sinaloan allies, who felt that the Juárez Cartel had committed very little toward their joint endeavor, and were angry because of their execution of a couple of El Chapo's traffickers for trespassing in Juárez-claimed territory. La Barbie's renewed Nuevo Laredo offensive started shortly thereafter, when a column of vehicles bearing 17 young gunmen—including Oscar Rogelio García Pérez, half-brother of the deceased "El Chacho" García Sánchez—brazenly shot up a municipal police patrol-car at 9:30 a.m. on September 27, 2004, on Leandro Valle Avenue, leaving its two officers for dead. Two more police cars would be riddled by this same squad, leaving behind a total of two dead and three wounded, before the municipal police summoned help from the Army and state Policía Ministerial or "Ministerial Police." The attackers were chased back to their hideout at 2301 Veracruz Street, near the corner with Aquiles Serdán, and subdued—turning out to be rootless youths from the Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango mountains who had been hired by "El Chapo" Guzmán's organization.

Their orders had been to simply "get rid of Zetas" and the municipal policemen who protected them—the same instruction given to another 10-man hit squad which appeared that same day from a separate hideout in Colonia Jardín, armed with AK-47s and fragmentation grenades, who also killed several policemen, later commenting dismissively: "Too bad, but they're the same people as the Zetas." Both sides thereupon began to savage each other with renewed venom, the Zetas discarding five mutilated bodies in an abandoned house on October 9, 2004, with taunting messages scrawled in black magic-marker: one addressed to "El Chapo" Guzmán and Arturo Beltrán, plus a second that read: "Send more of these a— so as to kill them for you, q— Barby [*sic*] and Lucio El Sol." Since these were some of the earliest *narcomensajes* ever seen in Mexico, they would be reprinted in mass-circulation publications such as *La Jornada* and *El Universal*. Heavier military-grade ordnance and ever-more barbaric psy-ops tactics began to be employed, with prisoners being burned alive and the gruesomely-mutilated remnants of others publicly hanged from freeway overpasses.

Lazcano became the Zetas' overall leader as of November 2004, reconcentrating its elite company for precision attacks, while delegating lower-level auxiliaries to perform such mundane duties as street patrols in Nuevo Laredo and guarding Gulf Cartel installations. On January 7, 2005, the bodies of a Reynosa municipal policeman and his uncle were found, with a note from their Zeta killers in a pocket that read: "For 'El Chapo' Guzmán, for Arturo Beltrán, for

'La Barbie,' for 'El Mayo' Zambada, and whoever else wants to help them." Valdez replied by dumping a pair of bodies next month on the Monterrey-to-Nuevo Laredo highway, adorned with his own threats against the Zeta "turds." Despite the arrival in Tamaulipas of an additional 1,500 PFP agents as reinforcements, the targeted murders of municipal-police officers continued with the killing of off-duty *comandante* Héctor Villarreal Ortiz at a roadside foodstand at 3:00 a.m. on February 20, 2005, followed by seven more over the next few weeks (eventually, 20 policemen would lose their lives, along with at least 55 civilians).

La Barbie suffered a painful personal loss around this time, when his brother Armando Valdez was abducted and cruelly put to death by Miguel Ángel Treviño, despite repeated pleas for mercy. A further financial blow was delivered to Valdez when U.S. border agents stopped one of his tractor-trailers and seized 949 kilos of cocaine, while his marriage ended in separation from wife Virginia, sending his two sons to be raised by his parents in Texas. To make matters worse, Virginia's mother was arrested while working as a drug courier, police stopping her with more than $1 million in cash in her Cessna at a private airport in Gainesville, Georgia; the Sinaloa Cartel, she told them, had been paying her $3,000 for every $100,000 in drugs that she smuggled into the country. As his eight-month-old *Negros* offensive ground into a stalemate in Nuevo Laredo, and Milenio support faded away, Valdez would begin recuperating at a luxurious safe house outside the distant Sinaloan stronghold of Acapulco [2005 population: 616,390].

First "Mata Zetas" Executions (May 2005–February 2006)

During the first week of May 2005, a covert four-man Zeta team pretending to be vacationers stole into Acapulco to abduct Sinaloa Cartel members, while a five-man squad was doing the same in Zihuatanejo—both groups of infiltrators being almost immediately caught. Thirsting to avenge his brother's death, La Barbie personally interrogated the four Acapulco captives at his large mansion in the wealthy Costa Azul district on May 16, 2005, recording their ordeal on video. They confessed details about their cruel work as Gulf Cartel *sicarios*, telling lurid stories about abducting rivals, killing reporters, burying people's daughters, and other such barbarities, until Valdez's gun appeared from off-camera and shot their leader in the head, followed by his three terrified companions. La Barbie would subsequently post this graphic video on YouTube and send a copy to *The Dallas Morning News* for wider circulation, intending to expose the Zetas' self-confessed atrocities.

Meanwhile, though, the dead Zeta leader's captive wife was being very well treated, her little girl receiving a bowl of cereal with a banana for her breakfast, and then allowed to play in the mansion's pool. Valdez freed both mother and daughter unharmed, having them driven to Acapulco's bus-terminal for release, and even personally giving them 1,000 pesos to pay their fares and expenses out of town—remaining so chillingly aloof about being identified as the four *sicarios*' executioner as to hand the mother a picture of himself to show to any Zetas who might inquire as to their hit-squad's fate. [For greater details about this incident, see "Mata Zetas or Matazetas."]

Zeta retaliation came when another hit-squad struck Acapulco on August 2, 2005, murdering Julio Carlos López Soto, assistant director of Guerrero's state Policía Investigadora Ministerial or "Ministerial Investigative Police" (PIM). Three days later, these attackers released his

bodyguard—beaten but otherwise unharmed—who relayed a message directly from Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén to a press conference from his hospital bed: "They told me to tell you (the media) that they are already here in Guerrero, with 120 Zeta fighting-men from Tamaulipas; and send along greetings from Mr. Goyo Sauceda, and long live Tamaulipas!" [Gregorio "El Goyo" Sauceda Gamboa, overall commander of the Gulf Cartel *sicarios*.] Hit-and-run attacks began against Sinaloan dealers, stash houses, shipments, and auxiliaries throughout this resort city and its district, until its *plaza* chief, Carlos Esteban Landeros Sánchez, was slain in February 2006.

Savage Defense of Acapulco (February–September 2006)

At that point, Arturo Beltrán instructed La Barbie to assume command over Acapulco's *plaza* and raise a new paramilitary force to respond in kind—which he provocatively dubbed the Pelones or "Buzz-Cuts" as a gibe against the ex-military men comprising the Zetas. [A longstanding slang nickname for soldiers, because of their distinctive close-cropped hair; when a Tamaulipas state representative had spoken publicly in early November 2004 about gunmen seen roaming around his San Fernando district, then abruptly ceased talking about this subject, one anonymous resident warily told a visiting journalist: "We know that the Pelones (as the Zetas are known here) threatened him, and for his own safety he decided to keep quiet."]

The bitter personal animosity which Valdez felt toward Miguel Treviño and the Zetas was to make the subsequent fighting even more inhumane. On April 21, 2006, the heads of two Zetas were found dangling on an exterior wall of Guerrero's *Secretaría de Finanzas* or "Financial Secretariat" offices in Acapulco, along with a tersely-written message: "To teach you some respect." A decapitated body was later found, with a list naming 23 policemen and civilians plus the words: "These will be next." A month later, La Barbie bought a full-page spread in the May 26, 2006, edition of the mass-circulation *Milenio* to address a warning to the head of the *Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana* or "Mexican Republic's Employers' Association," as well as candidates in the upcoming presidential elections, of "the great cancer which the Zetas represent, as in whatever territory they set foot, they convert it into a zone of death."

Another human head was found on the staircase of Acapulco's Palacio Municipal on June 29, 2006, along with a note personally addressed to the Zeta field-commander Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano, a deserter from the Army's GAFE special-forces: "Lascano [*sic*]: so that you will keep sending me more of your GAFE a—." And two days afterward, a pair of heads were once again found hanging from the wall of Acapulco's State Financial Secretariat offices, with the admonition: "One more message, you filth, so that you will learn some respect." The Zetas responded by dumping five plastic bags of body-parts along a highway on July 21, 2006, with the words:

> *Here are your people: even if protected by the AFI, soldiers, and other organizations, you will follow, Édgar Valdez Villareal, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, and Lupillo. You keep laughing, but I am going to kill you: the Shadow.*

Yet despite such repeated acts of bestiality, neither side could defeat the other or gain any ground, so that Zeta interest shifted elsewhere after the eccentric Familia Michoacana arose to challenge their lucrative occupation of neighboring Michoacán in September 2006.

Breaking Allegiances (May 2008–January 2010)

When Arturo Beltrán angrily severed his longtime alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel and went to war against that organization as of the first week in May 2008, La Barbie remained loyal to his mentor and held Acapulco with his Pelones against "El Chapo" Guzmán's forces. Gradually, though, the powerful Sinaloans gained the upper hand, while Arturo Beltrán became increasingly erratic as his cocaine addiction worsened. As chief of his personal security-detail, even Valdez did not feel safe from Beltrán's growing paranoia and volatile mood-swings, later commenting:

> *I was friends with Arturo, but when he was on drugs, he wanted to kill me. And when he wasn't, everything was cool.*

On December 11, 2009, Arturo Beltrán—despite being the most-wanted man in Mexico—decided to host a *posada* or "Christmas party" at his luxurious home in Ahuatepec, near Tepoztlán just outside Cuernavaca, its grounds being patrolled by La Barbie with two-dozen bodyguards sporting gold-and-diamond-studded semi-automatic pistols. An elite naval special-forces unit suddenly stormed this residence, killing 3 *sicarios* and detaining 11 others, while their boss and Valdez barely managed to escape.

Obstinately persisting with his self-indulgent plans, Beltrán prepared for a second time to host his Christmas party only five days later, in a luxury apartment in the Colonia Lomas de la Selva district of Cuernavaca. La Barbie was not present, only four *sicarios* guarding Beltrán inside this apartment, with additional gunmen and lookouts stationed in perimeters outside the building, when 200 helicopter-borne *marinos* struck again at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon, December 16, 2009. Approximately 20 fragmentation-grenades were fired by Beltrán's defenders in a vain attempt to stem this onslaught, during which their boss allegedly phoned his absent security-chief and asked Valdez to hurry men to his rescue. Legend has it that La Barbie told Arturo that his situation was hopeless, urging him to surrender: "Why fight? You could die." Arturo refused, barking that he was going to shoot his way out or die trying, and so was killed by the *marinos* along with four companions.

Short-Lived Cartel (2010)

Whether Valdez's absence that afternoon was deliberate or not, Héctor "El H"—the Beltrán Leyva brother who inherited command over their cartel—immediately blamed him and put out the word that he wanted La Barbie killed, especially after another brother (Carlos Alberto Beltrán Leyva) was also arrested in Culiacán by the Policía Federal on December 30, 2009. In order to prevail in the upcoming war for control over the various remaining fragments of the Beltrán-Leyva Organization in Guerrero, Morelos, State of Mexico, and Nuevo León, Héctor and Sergio "El Grande" Villarreal Barragán decided to strengthen their ties with the Zetas, so that La Barbie in turn allied himself with a formidable Beltrán-Leyva lieutenant named Gerardo "El Indio" Álvarez Vázquez. He also turned to Carlos "El Charro" Montemayor, father of his new wife, Priscilla, who reluctantly agreed to support his son-in-law.

Early next year, La Barbie proclaimed his own *Cártel Independiente de Acapulco* or "Independent Cartel of Acapulco" (CIDA), but soon found his position challenged from all sides. Soldiers raided his high-rise complex shortly thereafter, but alerted by his

outer security-ring, Valdez managed to escape downstairs, fleeing on a motorcycle wearing a backpack full of grenades. However, numerous subordinates rebelled and attacked his loyalists, while his greatest ally, "El Indio" Álvarez, was apprehended on April 21, 2010. La Barbie struggled to retain control over Acapulco, but his war against the Beltráns resulted in hundreds of deaths, with more decapitated bodies left dangling from bridges and tourism in decline. Then on July 11, 2010, his longtime lieutenant Gamaliel "El Güero Huetamo" Aguirre was captured by a *marino* strike-team at a home on Granjas del Marqués Street, along with three bodyguards.

Capture and Extradition (August 2010)

Reduced to shifting between Acapulco and Cuernavaca and Mexico City, rarely staying in one place for more than a night, La Barbie's luck finally run out when one of his assistants was pulled over by police on the way to a Mexico City carwash. By threatening his family, the Policia Federal intelligence-unit learned that Valdez was ensconced in a fortified ranch-house in the idyllic community of Salazar, in the rural municipality of Lerma near La Marquesa in the State of Mexico. A large Federal Police assault-team stormed that residence on Monday, August 30, 2010, capturing the 37-year-old fugitive as he attempted to flee out its side entrance. An M-16 rifle with two loaded magazines, Heckler & Koch 9mm MP5 submachine gun with another two clips, and a grenade launcher were found in his car. The 120 Federal Police intelligence-agents who executed this apprehension—still dressed in their navy-blue berets and T-shirts, with khaki pants—celebrated their triumph upon returning into Mexico City at 1:30 a.m. on August 31, 2010, by driving their 30-vehicle column to the famed El Borrego Viudo *taquería* at the corner of Revolución Avenue and the Miguel Alemán Viaduct to feast upon "tacos, soft drinks, and *tepache* [sweet, lightly-fermented pineapple juice served ice-cold]."

Incarcerated over the next five years, Valdez was finally extradited to the United States on September 30, 2015, along with Jorge Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla Sánchez and 11 other defendants. The most serious charges against La Barbie entailed the murder of an American Consulate worker and an Immigration and Customs agent, plus contributing toward some of the most gruesome violence in Mexican history (including beheadings of rival gang-members and videotaping of executions), in addition to his outstanding warrants in Louisiana and Georgia for drug-related crimes. Eventually, he pleaded guilty next January 2016 to conspiring to import and distribute cocaine, as well as laundering money, being sentenced in the U.S. District Court for the Northern Division of Georgia in Atlanta on June 11, 2016, to serve 49 years and one month in a federal penitentiary, plus pay $192 million in restitution for the profits accrued throughout his criminal career. The U.S. government's sentencing memorandum explained:

> *Valdez was responsible for the distribution of at least 12,000 kilograms of cocaine (a conservative estimate). From 2005 until 2007, the average sales-price for a kilogram of cocaine in Atlanta, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Chicago was $16,500, and $15,500–17,000 in Memphis. Giving Valdez the benefit of any doubts, based on an estimated average sales-price of $16,000 per kilogram of cocaine . . .* [he] *would have collected at least $192,000,000 of proceeds from his cocaine distribution. Valdez should not be allowed to keep the proceeds from his illegal activities, that inflicted so much*

damage on so many people. Through this forfeiture order, the government is seeking to disgorge some measure of the riches Valdez amassed during his kingpin years and deprive him of the benefit from those funds.

See also: Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI); Beltrán-Leyva Organization: Prominence et seq.; Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009).

Further Reading

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Z

We in the U.S. have to look long and hard at ourselves. We have an insatiable desire for drugs, and unless we can get a handle on the demand, we are not going to get anywhere.

—DEA agent Don Thornhill
(March 2002)

Zeta Original Gunmen (1997–2003). Initial phase in this gang's evolution, when a small cadre of military-trained bodyguards and assassins would help Osiel Cárdenas Guillén secure undisputed mastery over the Gulf Cartel.

Army Deserters (1997–1998)

These young criminals had first been exposed to the drug-trade's allure while reassigned from Army duties during the spring of 1997 to temporarily cover for a shortfall of agents in the FEADS division of the Procuraduría General de la República or Federal "Attorney-General's Office" (PGR). As part of this secondment, some 1,000 soldiers—650 of them newly-minted GAFEs—would become deputized as federal *judiciales* or "judicial policemen," and about 350 were sent north to serve as clandestine field-operatives based out of Reynosa. Their directive was to infiltrate smuggling-operations along the Tamaulipas-Texas border, one participant—Mateo Díaz López, later a founding member of the Zetas—describing his assignment as follows:

> *I was commissioned to carry out intelligence work related to the activities being conducted by said suspects, such as whether they were spending American dollars, or driving stolen cars, or setting up* tiendas *or "stores"* [*i.e.,* street-level retail drug-outlets]*, or if they had any ongoing* jales *or "jobs," with the aim of establishing whether they were mixed up in anything bad and reporting upon it.*

In keeping with standard PGR field-practice, each plainclothes infiltrator was allocated a code number so as to maintain radio contact with his superiors, consisting of the double-letter "ZZ" followed by successive numerals: ZZ-1, ZZ-2, etc. [For greater details about this inter-service loan program, see "FEADS."]

These highly skilled yet poor, uneducated soldiers—most barely in their 20s—were dazzled by the princely sums to be had from the drug trade, and some were soon won over by their new cartel friends: one of the first being a 22-year-old, GAFE-trained corporal named Arturo Guzmán Decena, who deserted in late September 1997 to become a well-paid personal bodyguard for Gilberto "El June" García Mena, longtime Gulf Cartel regional boss for the border municipality of Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas [opposite Roma, Texas]. Guzmán would soon be joined by another ex-FEADS operative and fellow GAFE, 23-year-old corporal Heriberto Lazcano, and together this pair of daredevils would find plenty of work amid the power struggle smoldering between factions in the

aftermath of the arrest two years previously of Gulf Cartel leader Juan García Ábrego—more than 200 murders being registered in Tamaulipas in 1998, followed by a similar number next year.

Recruitment as Cartel Mercenaries (1999)

At the end of January 1999, Osiel Cárdenas—a claimant to the Gulf Cartel leadership at Matamoros—sent four of his gunmen to free his lieutenant Víctor Manuel "El Meme" Vázquez Mireles while he was being shuttled back from a court appearance to Reynosa's prison. Although this interception was carried out satisfactorily, the two policemen driving the prisoner in a pickup being held at gunpoint with AK-47s until the captive and his liberators could escape, Cárdenas was not pleased. Having learned about the superlative skills of El June's henchman, Arturo Guzmán, he asked this young GAFE deserter in February 1999 to gather about 20 men so as to murder one of his rivals for the top cartel position: Rolando "El Rolys [or Rolis]" López Salinas. Despite the failure of his assault, Guzmán acquitted himself so bravely during this pitched gun-battle that he and Lazcano were soon being offered other contracts—which they performed with great alacrity.

By now, a few other GAFEs and FEADS agents had also heard about Guzmán's well-paid arrangement with a border drug-boss, so that a handful began seeking him out: Jesús Enrique "El Mamito" Rejón Aguilar, for example, a GAFE explosives specialist and FEADS field-agent who years later would testify how after enlisting as a 16-year-old and performing six years of military service, he had deserted from the Army on February 27, 1999—and next month "went to Reynosa," where he met up with Guzmán and eventually became Z-7. [The Army's *Dirección General de Infantería* or "General Infantry Directorate" inquiry into Rejón's desertion concluded on November 26, 1999, and was filed under case-number SAMD-22650, Expediente I/III/14.] Another ex-GAFE who joined this criminal association would be 26-year-old Galdino Mellado Cruz, who had originally enlisted on September 1, 1992, and applied to end his seven years of military service as of May 1, 1999, eventually becoming Z-9. A third veteran soldier was Luis Reyes Enrique "El Rex" Velázquez Salazar, an *hidalguense* who had joined the Army on January 30, 1990; risen to the rank of first-sergeant; become seconded as a temporary FEADS "A"-class field-agent as of March 1, 1998; then resigned from military service next year to join Guzmán's band and become Z-12.

Not all lists coincide which have been compiled over the years enumerating each Zeta founder, despite encompassing only a small cadre who would later refer to themselves as the *Grupo de los Catorce* or "Group of 14"—or simply *Los 14* ("the 14") or *Zetas de Primera Generación* ("First-Generation Zetas"), according to an intelligence-report filed with the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública or "Secretariat of Public Safety" (SSP). The best available information suggests that early members' identities were as follows, although some numerals would later be reallocated because of losses due to deaths or imprisonments:

Z-1: Arturo Guzmán Decena

Z-2: initially Alejandro Lucio Morales Betancourt, who piloted various smuggling flights out of Colombia until he was arrested on November 17, 2001, and replaced by Rogelio "El Kelín" or "El Quelín" González Pizaña—not an Army

veteran himself, but an ex-Federal Preventive Police officer and prominent Tamaulipecan smuggler

Z-3: Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, later to become the bloodthirsty leader of the Zeta Cartel

Z-4: Hugo Ponce Salazar, who would be arrested shortly after participating in the raid on the State Ministerial Police headquarters in Matamoros on June 20, 2001

Z-5: Luis Alberto Guerrero Reyes, a deserter from the 70th Infantry Battalion who would be killed on May 10, 2004, so that Braulio "El Gonzo" Arellano Domínguez—who had also deserted from the Army in June 1999, and initially received the numeral Z-20—succeeded to this code number, until his own death at the hands of naval special-forces on November 3, 2009

Z-6: Mateo "El Mariguanín" Díaz López, another deserter originally from Tabasco, where he would later become regional Zeta *comandante* and eventually be arrested for drunkenness in a Cunduacán bar on July 15, 2006 (his *sicarios* attempting to rescue him a few hours later by vainly storming its municipal jail with assault rifles and bazookas)

Z-7: Jesús Enrique "El Mamito" Rejón Aguilar, who in addition to serving as one of Cárdenas' personal bodyguards would be entrusted with purchasing safehouses for the Gulf Cartel

Z-8: Óscar "El Winnie Pooh" Guerrero Silva, formerly a logistics staff-officer with the *Agrupamiento de Servicios Generales* or "General Services Grouping" of the Army's *Estado Mayor* or "High Command"

Z-9: Raúl Alberto "El Alvin" Trejo Benavides, who would be killed in May 2003 and succeeded in this designation by Galdino Mellado Cruz, an ex-GAFE who had applied for his official discharge from military service as of May 1, 1999

Z-10: initially Ernesto "El Traca" Zataraín Belíz, until he committed suicide on December 10, 2001, being succeeded in this numeral by Omar "El Mono Tonto" Lorméndez Pitalúa (some lists instead naming Flavio "El Amarillo" Méndez Santiago, although he would confess years later to having only ever been Z-23, personally hired by Osiel Cárdenas in 1999 to act as one of his bodyguards at a starting weekly-salary of $600)

Z-11: apparently the original Zeta designation given to Galdino Mellado Cruz, before he succeeded to the numeral Z-9

Z-12: Luis Reyes Enrique "El Rex" Velázquez Salazar, an *hidalguense* who had served nine years in the Army before resigning in 1999 (his unusual three given names often leading to his misidentification as "Luis Reyes Enríquez")

Z-13: Héctor Daniel Reyes Reyes, a 15-year-old recruit originally born in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, who would not become active in Zeta operations for another decade, ending with his arrest in August 2011 in Guanajuato

Z-14: Efraín "El Chispa" Teodoro Torres, another veteran soldier originally from the state of Veracruz, who had enlisted in the infantry as of August 1, 1991, and been promoted to corporal three years afterward, before deserting on September 13, 1998

Other early recruits included Gustavo "El Erótico" González Castro, who had enlisted as an infantry private in the Air Force on March 22, 1990, been promoted to corporal by 1995, resigned from active duty to become a member of its reserves on August 1, 1999, and then joined the Zetas as Z-15; Raúl Lucio "El Lucky" Hernández Lechuga,

who had enlisted along with his childhood friend Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano into the infantry at Pachuca on June 5, 1991, before deserting to join Guzmán's mercenaries, and been assigned numeral Z-16 [although some sources attribute this designation to Víctor Nazario Castrejón Peña, Guzmán's former commander, who was later appointed as Zeta boss for Chiapas]; Gonzalo "El Cuije" Gerezano Escribano, a native of Nogales, Veracruz, who enlisted in the Army on April 25, 1992, completed GAFE training and was detached to serve as a FEADS field-agent, resigned from the military as of May 1, 1999, to become a member of Cárdenas' security detail as Z-18 and—thanks to the machinations of "El June" García—was enrolled as a Ciudad Alemán municipal policeman. In addition, Carlos Vera Calva became Z-17, serving as both a bodyguard and paymaster for Guzmán's company, while Maxiley "El Contador" Barahona Nadales was Z-19.

Braulio "El Gonzo" Arellano Domínguez, who had enlisted in the Army on February 22, 1993, and deserted as of June 21, 1999, was initially given the numeral Z-20 before succeeding to the vacated Z-5 [although the grip of his gaudy gold-plated, diamond-encrusted M1911 semiautomatic pistol, recovered after his death in a losing gun-battle against naval special-forces, was still adorned with the words "El Gonzo" and "Z-20" picked out in colored gemstones]. Yet another *hidalguense* recruit would be Nabor "El Débora" Vargas García, born in Pachuca on July 12, 1976; enlisted on June 28, 1995; attained the rank of corporal (and even served a rotation in the elite Cuerpo de Guardias Presidenciales or "Presidential Guard Corps") before resigning from the military on July 1, 1999—and then endured six years of unemployment, before finally joining this criminal enterprise in 2005 and receiving the vacant code number Z-20. Raúl "El Flander I" Hernández Barrón had enlisted as an infantryman on September 1, 1993, and resigned exactly six years later [casefile: A.P. PGR/UEDO/061/03].

It should be noted that these early volunteers for Guzmán's mercenary cadre were initially employed as individual bodyguards or in small groups, not part of any larger formation. Virtually all of these 31 Zeta founders would be drawn from among the lower ranks, military intelligence later identifying five ex-lieutenants, four sub-lieutenants, three sergeants, three corporals, and the rest privates. None had any inkling that they were laying the framework for a future cartel—or that by 2011, 7 of them would be dead and 15 others in prison.

Coalescence (2000–2001)

A second assassination-attempt was made on September 22, 2000, against "El Rolys" López—one of Cárdenas' main remaining challengers for Gulf Cartel leader, believed to have since allied himself with the Sinaloa Cartel—although this attack likewise failed and only wounded López Salinas' chauffeur. However, his alignment with the Sinaloans was seemingly confirmed when six *sicarios* were arrested five days later after a heated gun-battle with state ministerial policemen in Ciudad Camargo, and it was discovered that these interlopers had been brought in from Culiacán and Guamúchil by El Rolys.

Anticipating further trouble, Cárdenas approached his young henchman Arturo Guzmán again and asked him to organize a deadly paramilitary company composed of the *mejores hombres armados* or "best armed men," rather than brutish *pistoleros* or "pistol men"—to which Guzmán replied that such marksmen could only come from

the Army. Cárdenas thereupon instructed him to recruit more disgruntled soldiers, backed by the Gulf Cartel's financial resources. An informant later disclosed that the charismatic ex-corporal's initial recruitment efforts drew servicemen out of the Army garrison at Reynosa—at that time comprising the 15th and 70th (Puebla) Infantry Battalions and 15th Motorized Cavalry Regiment—as well as from the elite Brigada de Fusileros Paracaidistas or "Fusilier Parachutists Brigade" (BFP). It was said that the 15th Infantry Battalion alone contributed seven deserters from its attached 308th GAFE Company.

Proceeding methodically, Guzmán next focused on units that had been in Hidalgo while he was stationed there during the early 1990s, and therefore still included some members known to him, as well as companies from his home state of Puebla. Most volunteers were won over by generous bounties—*cañonazos de dólares* or "cannon volleys of dollars," as they were jestingly called; and although acknowledged as a very brave and skillful fighter, Guzmán lacked the necessary organizational training of a military professional, so that Cárdenas assigned three ex-Army officers to help him marshal a cohesive force: Lieutenant Javier Antonio Quevedo Guerrero, formerly of the 21st Cavalry Regiment at Nuevo Laredo; the retired Army Lieutenant Rubén "El Chato" Salinas; and Óscar (Z-8) Guerrero Silva, who had been a logistics staff-officer with the Estado Mayor or "High Command" of the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional or "Ministry of National Defense" (Sedena). Guzmán directed that some platoon-level instruction begin immediately for his recruits gathering at Matamoros, taught by Luis Alberto (Z-5) Guerrero Reyes and another ex-Army lieutenant, Carlos Hau Castañeda.

Guzmán and Cárdenas' recruitment efforts would be unwittingly abetted when the opposition PAN candidate Vicente Fox was installed into office as Mexico's new president on December 1, 2000, and the Army wound down its loan program of soldiers to FEADS. A few days later, the last 100 or so GAFEs who had returned to their regular military duties were paraded at the San Miguel de los Jagüeyes training-base (Campo Militar 37-C) in the municipality of Huehuetoca near Mexico City and addressed by a general officer—who told them that because of their detached service, those who wished to resign from the Army would be given an honorable discharge and severance pay with a bonus. More than half accepted and parted on good terms—but some months later, intelligence officers at the Eighth Military Zone headquarters in Reynosa began noticing several of their names reappearing in early 2001 as members of a new criminal gang on the Frontera Chica between Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Miguel Alemán, comprised of former Army personnel who called themselves the "Zetas" because of the distinctive "Z" code numerals used during their radio communications.

Enhanced Training (2001)

Guzmán tested out his new contingent by personally leading a small Zeta hit-squad in the attempted assassination of another competing trafficker out of Monterrey—Edelio "El Yeyo" López Falcón, leader of a Juárez Cartel affiliate known as the *Señor de los Caballos* or "Lord of the Horses" because of his love of thoroughbred racehorses—at 4:00 a.m. on May 13, 2001, following a performance by the famed *ranchero* singer Vicente Fernández in a traditional wooden *palenque* or "cock-fighting pit" at the Expo of Monterrey, Nuevo León.

Guzmán's next strike fared somewhat better, when he led an assault team of 25 heavily-armed Zetas disguised in black GAFE uniforms—including Mateo (Z-6) Díaz, Omar (Z-10) Lorméndez, Efraín (Z-14) Teodoro, and Gustavo (Z-15) González—in a bold raid on June 20, 2001, which broke a colleague out of confinement at the State Ministerial Police headquarters in Matamoros. [José Ramón "El Cholo" Dávila López, an ex-infantry corporal and paratroop second-sergeant, who had deserted after a dozen years' Army service as long ago as January 4, 1999, but had only recently joined the Zetas on February 16, 2001.] Witnesses testified that these assailants used high-powered AK-47s, AR-15s, and a tear-gas grenade launcher to rescue their comrade—but although successful, three members of this team were subsequently caught and wound up in a maximum-security facility in Mexico City: Hugo (Z-4) Ponce Salazar, the ex-city policeman Octavio Garza, and José Guadalupe Triana.

Incensed by these detentions and an overall increase in police activity throughout Matamoros, the Zetas retaliated less than three weeks later on July 9, 2001, when the State Ministerial Police commander for that city—Jaime Yáñez Cantú, in office for scarcely three months, and who had proclaimed his intent of enforcing the city's 5,580 pending arrest-warrants, some dating back as far as 1990—was shot to death along with his police driver, Gerardo Gascón Soltero, by gunmen who raced up in a pickup beside Yáñez's parked vehicle outside Las Escolleras Restaurant and fired off a fatal barrage of bullets.

Another witness who experienced these early Zetas firsthand would be Angélica Lagunas Jaramillo—Arturo Guzmán's future mother-in-law and wife-to-be of Omar (Z-10) Lorméndez—when Osiel Cárdenas visited her store accompanied by Heriberto Lazcano, Luis Reyes, Alfonso Lechuga, José González, and Lorméndez, among others, on August 16, 2001, to demand that she pay a *derecho de piso* fee in order to remain in business. According to her deposition under file-number PGR/SIEDO/UEIDSC/001/2003, his armed gunmen's job was to:

> *. . . search for those who sold contraband wines and liquors, as well as Calle Diez prostitutes, who had to pay their* derecho de piso*. Additionally, they were in charge of guarding the beaches to prevent the arrival of boats bearing undocumented aliens, drugs, or contraband merchandise, without paying their* derecho de piso*.*

Still, Osiel Cárdenas was displeased with his elite *sicarios*' disjointed performances, and so ordered his entire small company of Zetas (now numbering more than 40 gunmen) to repair to a couple of his lonely rural properties in September 2001—Las Amarillas Ranch outside the village of China, seven miles southeast of the town of General Bravo, Nuevo León; and another along the Ciudad Victoria-to-Matamoros highway near the municipality of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, about 85 miles south-southwest of Brownsville, Texas. There they would undergo a two-month refresher course in military discipline, coordinated combat-tactics, and advanced-weaponry tutorials, delivered in training sessions much like what they had known during their Army days. Ex-military instructors Daniel "El Cachetes" Pérez Rojas, Héctor "El Caballo" Robles Duarte, Isidro "El Colchón" López Arias, and Miguel Ángel Soto Parra were brought in to impart the latest information on firearms, explosives, and tactics, the number of these paramilitary trainees soon exceeding 50 men. [Next year, fanatical Guatemalan Kaibiles would be

added to this teaching staff; see "Kaibiles: First Zeta Affiliations and Recruitment."]

Federal authorities learned of a shootout in Monterrey that involved some of these trainees on October 30, 2001, so opened a case file [number: PGR-UEDO/150/2001] to begin tailing suspects and learn more about their activities. The PGR consequently apprehended three of the Gulf Cartel's Colombian contacts in mid-November 2001 in Querétaro, which allowed them to roll up some drug-trafficking operations in Veracruz and Tamaulipas—in the process arresting on November 17, 2001 the smuggling pilot Lucio (Z-2) Morales Betancourt, who turned state's evidence and entered the Witness Protection Program as an informant codenamed "Geraldín" or "Yeraldín" [file number: PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS/111/2003]. He revealed to his interrogators how Cárdenas and Guzmán had not only recruited marksmen and weapons specialists, but had also attracted ex-Army communication and intelligence operatives—who would prove to be much greater assets to the Zetas.

Technological Superiority (2001–2002)

The presence of Zeta radiomen was officially disclosed on December 14, 2001, when José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos—Mexico's "top antidrug prosecutor" as chief of the Unidad Especializada contra la Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Organized-Crime Unit" (UEDO)—announced during a Mexico City press conference that among the 16 Gulf Cartel members recently arrested while transporting a large cargo of cocaine through Veracruz, 6 were known to the Army High Command as deserters from the 104th GAFE Company who had served in communication and intelligence capacities. Their specialized knowledge, coupled with Cárdenas' willingness to purchase the most sophisticated electronic equipment available, ensured that his paramilitary force would be able to eavesdrop on government and private radio-transmissions and telephone calls, collating information into intelligence reports that could then be used to:

- precisely pinpoint the position, strength, movements, and orders given to individual units;
- provide advance warning of the arrival of major reinforcements or special-forces contingents into a region;
- reveal names of infiltrators or informants; etc.

An American investigative journalist writing around this same time noted that the Zetas' combat skills should not be viewed as their greatest tactical asset, but rather: "It was the sophisticated lessons learned in intelligence-gathering, counter-intelligence, and psychological operations."

These defected Army specialists—soon to be known internally as *La Dirección* or "Directorate"—also tightened up Zeta and Gulf Cartel security by better disciplining their radio traffic through the imposition of effective codes and practices. For example, by the early 2000s they had compartmentalized all transmissions, assigning unique call-signs to each of the three major Gulf Cartel concentrations:

- cells or individuals operating out of Laredo being designated as "Lobos";
- those based at Matamoros being referred to as "Metros";
- while operatives from Reynosa identified themselves as "Rojos."

Stash houses for storing and processing bulk drug-shipments would also be codified, using the general term *punto* or "point" coupled with a distinctive designation:

- in Matamoros, *Punto Alacrán* or "Point Scorpion" near the airport; *Punto Blanco* or "White Point" near La Luz *ejido* or "communal farm"; *Punto Elefante* or "Elephant Point" in Colonia Doctores; *Punto Doctor* or "Doctor Point" in Colonia San José;
- in Reynosa, *Punto Cuarenta* ("Forty Point") or *40 Grande* ("Big 40") in the Fraccionamiento Las Fuentes district; *Punto Gimnasio* or "Gymnasium Point" beside the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas gymnasium in Fraccionamiento Las Fuentes; *Punto Néctar* or "Nectar Point" near the Puente Elevado; *Punto Roma* and *Punto Romi* in Colonia San Francisco; etc.

Tiendas or "stores" for retail street-sales would be similarly codified, much of this groundwork being laid by Ernesto "El Traca" (Z-10) Zataraín Belíz, before his suicide in a warehouse owned by Ezequiel Cárdenas Guillén on René Guajardo Street in Matamoros on December 10, 2001.

Battle for Nuevo Laredo (February 2002–February 2003)

By early 2002, the national magazine *Proceso* was receiving multiple reports from alarmed civilians about long, military-style columns of identical black pickups roaring down highways in Tamaulipas, manned by 50 or more heavily-armed gunmen wearing matching black uniforms complete with helmets, balaclavas, bulletproof vests, and combat boots—appearing to all the world like Army patrols, except for the white "Z" stenciled prominently on their door panels. Not even the arrest of Zeta treasurer Rubén "El Cacahuate" Sauceda Rivera by the military on January 14, 2002, could check such brazen displays.

The first major conflict in which this newly-constituted Zeta force would be deployed was sparked when Gulf Cartel boss Cárdenas—having paid the requisite *derecho de piso* or "transit fee" to Dionisio Román "El Chacho" García Sánchez, one of two gang-leaders who controlled Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas—to smuggle two tons of cocaine through that border-city into Texas, dispatched this consignment from Matamoros in February 2002 in three armored SUVs with a Zeta escort commanded by Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano. Upon entering Nuevo Laredo to be guided through that city by the colluding *comandante* of its Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" detachment, Lazcano's convoy was instead confronted by this AFI officer with ten of his agents, who refused to honor the agreement and tried to seize the cargo.

Lazcano having previously detached other Zetas to act as his column's unseen scouts and outriders, quickly summoned them by radio and captured the treacherous AFI squad in turn. The young Zeta field-commander then radioed Matamoros for instructions and was told by Cárdenas' lieutenant Jorge Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla Sánchez to release his captives and retreat. The Zetas were pursued out onto the highway by the freed AFI agents and a swarm of Nuevo Laredo's municipal police officers, and many shots were exchanged before the fleeing Zetas blocked the highway with an empty Ford Lobo pickup with tinted windows, which their pursuers shot to pieces from a safe distance, while Lazcano and his men escaped.

Infuriated by El Chacho's double-dealing, Cárdenas ordered his entire Zeta company to gather at the Gulf Cartel's Punto Cuarenta safe-house in Reynosa, to

prepare to infiltrate and launch a surprise retaliatory-strike within García's own stronghold. The Zetas dispersed into small groups and entered Nuevo Laredo undetected aboard a variety of passenger buses, reassembling at another safe house located on Tamaulipas Street, between Morelos and Juárez. There, they received their heavy weaponry and ammunition, smuggled into them by Crispín "El Sosa" Nava Pérez in a *clavo* or "hidden compartment" in his Chevrolet Trailblazer SUV.

Despite being a former Tamaulipas State Police officer—son of that force's 1980s commander, Óscar García Teneyuque—who moreover managed the flow of drugs through Nuevo Laredo on behalf of the powerful Juárez Cartel of Vicente Carrillo Fuentes and Milenio Cartel of Armando Valencia, García's 300 or so *Chacho* street-thugs proved no match for the sophisticated intelligence and terrifying tactics of the 50–60 Zetas. An informant later described how during the initial phase of fighting in March 2002, Arturo Guzmán and Heriberto Lazcano personally "hunted" a band of four municipal policemen, abducting and torturing them to death, before burning their corpses in 200-liter steel drums.

This opening offensive climaxed when—thanks to a *pitazo* or "tipoff" received from Arturo Pedroza Aguirre, a *comandante* of the Policía Ministerial in Nuevo León—the Zetas learned that their opponent was at his safe house at 151 Honorato de Balzac Street in Colonia Colinas de San Jerónimo in distant Monterrey. El Chacho was consequently abducted outside this residence along with four companions by a Zeta *comando* or "hit squad" personally led by Arturo Guzmán at dawn on May 13, 2002, during which the top Chacho *gatillero* or "triggerman" Juvenal Torres Sánchez was also shot dead in an upstairs bedroom. García's mutilated remains were found next day, still clad in his red underwear, washed ashore in a Río Bravo *brecha* or "break" near Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas.

Notwithstanding the reinforcements sent to Los Chachos by the Milenio and Juárez Cartels, the Zetas effectively dominated Nuevo Laredo by May 2002, although they were too few in number to occupy that city of 308,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, they roamed it at will, emerging out of the night to pick off hapless targets and spread terror, bringing rival drug-trafficking to a halt. Newspapers reported that between April and November 2002, at least 24 people were abducted in Nuevo Laredo and dozens more killed—most by a well-organized group "dressed in black and carrying high-powered weapons, who intercept their victims in the streets or remove them from their homes, to then make them disappear." A black-clad Zeta squad armed with AK-47s even forced their way into Nuevo Laredo's San José Hospital at 4:00 a.m. one morning in August 2002, subduing its personnel and proceeding to a room where they murdered a convalescent Chacho gang-member named Ismael "El Mayelo" Flores Godínez.

One of the few successes scored by the authorities against the victorious Zetas occurred in Matamoros on the evening of November 21, 2002, when Arturo Guzmán—after downing several strong drinks and a few lines of cocaine—left the Pisa y Corre Restaurant to visit his mistress, Ana Bertha González Lagunas, at her nearby Herrera Street home. Having instructed his *sicarios* to block off its street and divert all traffic, he was caught off-guard when an anonymous tip was phoned in by an irate neighbor to UEDO (the Federal "Organized-Crime Specialized Unit,"

rather than to the ineffectual city police), and a party of soldiers and federal agents rushed to this scene. Half-drunk and lethargic, Guzmán proved uncharacteristically inept that night, firing wildly until he was struck down by four rounds. [For more information, see "Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Death."]

Yet his slaying had little effect on the fighting around Nuevo Laredo, the Zeta chain-of-command simply moving Z-2 up to become new leader: Rogelio "El Kelín" González Pizaña, an ex-state policeman and trafficker who controlled the clandestine Los Cuervos airstrip near Bagdad Beach, as well as being in command of all other Gulf Cartel *sicarios*—although his promotion was met with skepticism by the Zeta rank-and-file, who preferred their fellow deserter Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano. One month later, three AFI field-agents and a fourth from UEDO who had spent the previous ten days investigating the Gulf Cartel simply vanished while driving their Tsuru from Reynosa toward Nuevo Laredo on December 20, 2002. Contemporary newspaper accounts attributed their disappearance to "other policemen with ties to the drug-traffic, who had slipped this information to the Gulf *capos* or 'bosses'"—but it is more likely that unsuspected Zeta monitoring of radio and telephone chatter had revealed these agents' intended movements.

Galvanized by this targeted attack, the PGR hastened 300 extra agents into Nuevo Laredo, who swept through the nearby towns of Miguel Alemán and Los Ángeles—"both considered active bases-of-operation for the Gulf Cartel"—with Army support, in a vain attempt to flush out suspects. Unfazed by this show of force, the full company of 50-plus Zetas—armed with assault rifles and masquerading as black-clad special forces, led by Jesús Enrique (Z-7) Rejón Aguilar—boldly demanded entry into Matamoros' Santa Adelaida Prison at 2:40 a.m. on December 27, 2002, brandishing a fake release-order supposedly issued by UEDO. Once inside, they disarmed the night-guards and escaped with four incarcerated Gulf Cartel colleagues. Even the deployment of 300 more PGR agents into the region on January 9, 2003, failed to make any impression on the Zetas.

Unexpected Capture of Osiel Cárdenas (March 2003)

With the personal go-ahead from President Fox, 100 GAFEs and 50 AFI agents—supported by a helicopter circling in the distance—stormed Osiel Cárdenas' residence at 84 Virgo Street in Matamoros shortly before 10:00 a.m. on March 14, 2003, taking their boss and his 20 bodyguards (including numerous Zetas) completely by surprise. The latter nonetheless mounted sufficient resistance to allow him to jump over the backyard fence and attempt to flee on foot, although quickly caught. Yet upon removing him from the house as a prisoner shortly thereafter, Cárdenas' captors were fired upon again at long-range by his stubborn Zeta *sicarios*, who had been reinforced in the meantime, resulting in three soldiers wounded. A third Zeta rescue-attempt was made as the captive was being sped in a van toward the city's Servando Canales International Airport, only to be beaten off by a force of Policías Federales Preventivas who had joined the captors, so that Cárdenas was bundled aboard a Mexican Air Force plane and flown off to Mexico City.

Simultaneously, a large Sinaloa Cartel hit-squad sent by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán had also attacked the residence of Osiel's 41-year-old brother, Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén in Los Arcos Township, Nuevo León, briefly

capturing him before being annihilated by a Zeta counterattack supported by an armored vehicle.

Day-to-day cartel management was temporarily assumed by Tony Tormenta and "El Coss" Costilla, although Osiel remained actively involved from behind bars, so that the Zeta grip on Nuevo Laredo did not slacken. Less than three weeks later, on April 2, 2003, the mutilated remains of nine Chachos were found on that city's outskirts, a clear sign that the Gulf Cartel was not about to retreat back toward Reynosa because of their leader's incarceration—for in addition to the formidable Zetas, they still controlled Nuevo Laredo's police department, who helped defend their interests through identifying, plus sometimes abducting and killing, suspected foes. And the Zetas continued extorting the cartel's *derecho de piso* fees, easy work because of the dread that their name evoked. [A contemporary *Washington Post* article stated that they were guilty "of a wide range of crimes, from killing an estimated 100 people over the last five years and escorting millions of dollars worth of cocaine, to extorting money from small border businesses, from car junkyards to beauty parlors."]

Wider-Ranging Strikes (April–August 2003)

Soon, the incarcerated Cárdenas was able to apply his immense wealth toward suborning his jailers, so as to continue running cartel business and directing Zeta operations from inside La Palma or Altiplano Penitentiary, using dozens of Nextel cellphones and daily visits from his lawyers to convey his commands. In this fashion, he was able to instruct the Zetas to mount a long-distance foray deep into Milenio territory, where two gunmen killed his rival "El Yeyo" López while he was paying his bill at a table in the Café Madoka at the corner of Golfo de Cortés and Tarascos Streets in Guadalajara on May 6, 2003. [Contemporary investigators surmised that a four-man *comando* or "squad" had stalked and murdered El Yeyo—consisting of Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano, Luis Alberto (Z-5) Guerrero Reyes, Jesús Enrique (Z-7) "El Manito" Rejón, and Óscar (Z-8) Guerrero—but were never able to catch or interrogate them.]

Meanwhile in downtown Nuevo Laredo, neighbors of a modest middle-class dwelling at 2009 Mina Street had noticed a flurry of activity at dawn on June 23, 2003, as its occupants hastily decamped prior to the arrival of a throng of AFI agents who discovered a Zeta surveillance and communication center complete with annotated notebooks, 18 electronic recorders for eavesdropping on conversations, a computer with advanced software to search for cell-phone signals and tap them undetected; etc. Subsequently at 4:00 p.m. on July 7, 2003, a blue Suburban SUV being driven by the *comandante* of Nuevo Laredo's 150 AFI agents, Adolfo Ruiz Ibarra (who had been planted into office thanks to a million-dollar bribe from the Sinaloa Cartel), was intercepted at the corner of Leandro Valle Avenue and Canales Street by a white Suburban, whose occupants riddled his vehicle with bullets and struck him more than 20 times. After the Suburban crashed a block away, "three individuals dressed in black" emerged from the killers' pursuing vehicle to administer coup-de-grâce shots through the shattered windows, before calmly driving away. Sixty AFI reinforcements were rushed into Nuevo Laredo from Miguel Alemán to initiate sweeps for suspects in this brazen attack against one of their own (leading to clashes with municipal policemen, who were ordered to retire into their precincts so as to minimize frictions).

Apparently in response to the Milenio Cartel's efforts to regain their former position in Nuevo Laredo, Zetas also murdered six Valencia family members in the municipality of Los Reyes, Michoacán, on July 12, 2003, followed shortly thereafter by three more. Rattled by this unprecedented terror-tactic of attacking civilian noncombatants, many Valencias would begin relocating into Jalisco for greater safety. Tension meanwhile remained high in uneasy Nuevo Laredo, causing AFI agents to rush from their Santa Mónica Hotel around 3:00 a.m. on Friday, August 1, 2003, to assist a Ministerio Público agent named Juan Manuel Muñoz Morales, who was being chased by several individuals in a dark Suburban and had radioed for help. The AFI officers followed this suspect vehicle for several minutes with seven of their own vehicles, during which they were fired upon by five gunmen in a gray Grand Cherokee with Texas plates, eventually degenerating into a 40-minute shootout that involved at least three bazookas and left three dead and six captured, amid wholesale civilian panic. Eyewitnesses who insisted on anonymity claimed to have seen over "18 armed men in black with ski-masks."

A yet heavier and more prolonged gunbattle involving Milenio gunmen erupted one week later, leaving six dead and more than 700 spent cartridges littering downtown Nuevo Laredo on August 8, 2003, after which 200 municipal policemen were suspended from duty and a major investigation launched. While from his remote lockup, Cárdenas even ordered the long-range murder of one of his own attorneys, Juan Martín "El Capulina" Tapia Márquez, who had displeased him during a visit on August 31, 2003—and was found that very next day, tortured and dead from multiple gunshots in the front seat of a late-model SUV at Guadalupe on the outskirts of Monterrey, having been whisked 550 miles overnight by a Zeta death-squad.

Summary (Autumn 2003)

The Zetas' performance as a paramilitary force had proven an undeniable success for Cárdenas and the Gulf Cartel, achieving results that far exceeded their small numbers, while enduring few setbacks. Jorge Chabat, a Mexican academic specializing in organized crime, would comment: "They are not like other gunmen; they are well-trained and have discipline." The *Washington Post* would editorialize: "What has set the Zetas apart, in addition to their superior handling of weapons and radio equipment to monitor law-enforcement and rivals' activity, is their cohesion." By October 2003, Brigadier General Francisco Castillo Zaragoza—commander of the Eighth Military Zone headquartered at Reynosa—was describing the criminal mercenaries in the following terms:

> *"They have high-powered weapons, training, and intelligence capabilities," adding: "We get mad and embarrassed knowing these kinds of people stain the Mexican Army uniform. They served the nation of Mexico and then changed drastically, even betraying it."*

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) would refer to the Zetas as perhaps "the most technologically-advanced, sophisticated, and violent of these paramilitary enforcement-groups." An FBI assessment would summarize their emergence as the Gulf Cartel's "well-trained, brutal enforcers," in these broadly accurate terms:

> *Los Zetas emerged from the Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE), a Mexican*

Army unit created in the mid-1990s to combat drug-trafficking organizations along the US/Mexico border. The GAFE received special training in tactics and weapons. The U.S. military provided some of this instruction at Fort Benning, Georgia. These elite counter-drug troops learned to use sophisticated intelligence-gathering equipment, advanced weaponry, and specialized tactics to combat drug-traffickers . . .

An unknown number of GAFE soldiers under the command of Arturo Guzmán Decena deserted and joined the Gulf Cartel in early 2002. Reports differ on exact figures, but range from 31 to 67 deserters. They dubbed themselves Los Zetas after Decena's GAFE radio call-signal, "Zeta 1". Subsequently in a March 2002 shootout, group members helped a [excised] *elude capture by Mexican authorities. In May 2002, Los Zetas delivered control of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, to Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, by murdering his primary rivals Dionicio* [sic] *Román García Sánchez and Juvenal Torres Sánchez.*

Rival syndicates such as the Sinaloa Cartel had already begun recruiting ex-military men so as to compete, outfitting them with heavier-grade weaponry to match the Zetas' firepower—which meant that the violence and casualties spreading on all sides, especially among the civilian population, would grow proportionally worse for little tactical advantage. And most cartels failed to appreciate and therefore overlooked the value of the Zetas' superior intelligence-gathering so did not try to duplicate it. While for all their success, the Zetas themselves would be undone within a decade by several failings of their own:

- as paid enforcers for the Gulf Cartel, they had few additional sources of income beyond a secondary role in their employers' Colombian cocaine traffic;
- with growing competition for the services of fewer and fewer elite Army deserters, their limited numbers could not expand, except through
- admission of a swelling number of brutish career-criminals, hardened convicts, outlawed policemen, even sadistic gang-members attracted by their reputation for cruelty.

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel: Creation of Los Zetas; FEADS; GAFE; Guzmán Decena, Arturo: Founder of the Zetas; Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto.

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Zeta Gulf Cartel Soldiers (2004–2009).

Second phase in this contingent's evolution, when membership soared into the hundreds, as Zeta gunmen spearheaded this syndicate's expansion.

Long-Range Hit Teams (January–April 2004)

With a firm stranglehold on Nuevo Laredo, detached Zeta *comandos* or "squads" were freed to venture farther afield on special missions. A team of 30–40 men including Luis Alberto (Z-5) Guerrero, Efraín (Z-14) Teodoro, Gustavo (Z-15) González, and Jaime "El Hummer" González Durán, disguised in their usual black military garb and armed with AK-47s and AR-15s, arrived in a truck convoy with red and blue police-lights flashing—led by the Gulf Cartel's local Michoacán ally Carlos Alberto "El Tísico" Rosales Mendoza—outside the Centro de Rehabilitación Social or Social Rehabilitation Center [CERESO] prison at Apatzingán at 3:15 a.m. on Monday, January 5, 2004. Talking their way past its handful of sleepy night-guards by pretending to have been sent to conduct a surprise inspection for weapons and drugs among the inmates, the Zetas then tied up these custodians and 20 minutes later carried off at least 19 convicts, including three high-ranking Gulf Cartel members (plus two Milenio sub-commanders, who were slowly put to death).

Their boss, Osiel Cárdenas, incarcerated in El Altiplano, had meanwhile befriended his fellow inmate Benjamín Arellano Félix of the Tijuana Cartel, to the point of facilitating his Zetas for outside jobs. Therefore at 11:15 p.m. on January 21, 2004, two SUVs, one black and one gold, double-parked outside the Rubén's Hood Bar on Tijuana's Salinas Boulevard, four men alighting while the drivers waited with engines idling. Two guarded the door, while the other pair entered—one suddenly raising an AR-15 and shooting down the two bodyguards of Rodolfo Delgado Neri, a former Baja California *subprocurador* or "deputy attorney-general," while his companion fired an AK-47 burst which fatally struck that official nine times. As these assailants exited to their waiting vehicles, police radios crackled into life across the city, and a voice gruffly warned Gabriel Tapia Neri, ex-regional director for *Averiguaciones Previas* or "Ongoing Investigations:" "You're next."

Zetas dressed in black also led a surprise assault against Tijuana's "La Mesa" Jail on April 14, 2004, arriving at its rear entrance in two stolen vans to open up a machine-gun barrage against nearby guard-towers, helping five incarcerated Arellano gang-members to escape. And Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano apparently commanded the hit squad which murdered the Tijuana weekly *ZETA*'s editor Francisco J. Ortiz Franco on June 22, 2004—this journalist's "offense" having been to publish passport-photos

taken of 71 Arellano *sicarios*, which they intended to use in purchasing fake Baja California state credentials.

Renewed Trouble in Nuevo Laredo (Spring 2004)

Hostilities began reviving in this occupied border-city, as a low-key counteroffensive organized by a Texas-born trafficker exiled from Nuevo Laredo—Édgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal, with covert backing from the Milenio, Sinaloa, and Juárez Cartels—had infiltrated a couple of hundred hired gunmen to live undetected in rented hideouts or hotel rooms, emerging at night (oftentimes disguised as police officers) to rob or abduct midlevel Gulf Cartel operatives, as well as raiding drug-houses and intercepting consignments, even attacking the occasional Zeta. Luis Alberto (Z-5) Guerrero and his bodyguard, for example, were killed when more than 100 rounds were fired by "unknown assailants" into their silver Jeep Cherokee outside Matamoros' Wild West dance-hall on May 10, 2004.

Once the Gulf Cartel leadership realized that its rising losses in Nuevo Laredo were due to an orchestrated campaign, they ordered their Zeta paramilitary force to mount a defense of that vital smuggling-hub. Locally born ex-car thief Iván "El Talibán" Velazquez Caballero was appointed *plaza* boss, and a *New York Times* correspondent would report: "The most spectacular gunfights began here last spring [2004], and usually took place from 8:00 in the morning to 1:00 in the afternoon, on the elegant Avenida Colón." Lazcano—although residing in Ciudad Miguel Alemán—led the Zetas as their field commander, seconded by another locally-born criminal, Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales. Fighting would be conducted with ever-more sadistic psy-ops tactics, such as torturing or maiming prisoners, leaving corpses gruesomely displayed in public places, even beheadings [a barbarity introduced by bloodthirsty Guatemalan Kaibil mercenaries].

Recruitment Surge (Summer–Autumn 2004)

However, less than 100 Zetas were too few to provide citywide defense, so that their ostensible leader, Rogelio (Z-2) González, authorized raising more members. Military deserters were becoming difficult to acquire, being actively sought by competing gangs, plus better monitored by the Army. A government informant would later recount his own induction as a Zeta in September 2004—being a deserter and ex-municipal policeman recently employed as a guard at a Zeta drug-house—who was suddenly offered the opportunity of joining its paramilitary force. Upon approaching the Nuevo Laredo gas-station where he was to be assessed, he found "various vehicles with men standing guard" and explained why he had been sent, then:

> *One who seemed to be in authority asked him about his military and police backgrounds, and detailed how La Compañía retained a military organization and discipline, that punishments were harsh, but pay was good. His initial salary would be $200 a week, and if his performance proved satisfactory, it would rise to $500 a week. "Loyalty is most important," he was warned, "because treason can even result in the death of your family."*
>
> *Accepting these conditions, his interviewer walked over to a gold-colored Jeep Grand Cherokee and spoke to the man in its backseat. This vehicle then started up and approached, its door opening for a robust, fair-skinned man in his early 30s to repeat*

> *these instructions, threats, and promises. It was "El Talibán," Cobra or L-50, who was one of the lords of Nuevo Laredo at that time.* [Iván "El Talibán" Velazquez,Gulf Cartel chief for that *plaza*.]

Told to report to Héroes de Chapultepec Street, the informant was greeted there by Daniel "El 52" or "El Talibancillo" Velázquez Caballero, younger brother of the *plaza* chief, who directed him to ride with his *estaca* or "squad" in a thickly armored, brown-and-red Suburban with Texas license-plates to "El 52's" safe house in the Fraccionamiento Vías de San Miguel district, where they entered and:

> *He went into one of its bedrooms and returned with two new, black uniforms comprised of SWAT-type boots; campaign trousers; shirt; broad-brimmed canvas hat; and bulletproof vest; he also received an R-15 rifle with four loaded clips. They thereupon left in vans to a* chorro *(which is how Zetas refer to their ranches, most featuring a* chorro *or "stream" of water), arriving at a place called El Bayo, on the road exiting from Nuevo Laredo toward Piedras Negras.*
>
> *Some 30 to 40 people were waiting around seven or eight vehicles, including Miguel Treviño with his squad. This gathering was presided over by El Pita* [Omar (Z-10) Lorméndez] *and El Mateo* [Mateo (Z-6) Díaz]*, whose sole purpose was to introduce the four new "Ls," the informant among them. And without any further ado, they returned to work. A good deal of their time would be spent patrolling the city, roaming, seeking out rival people or houses, which would be leveled on orders from Heriberto Lazcano. The discovery of any drugs or weapons would lead to the capture of its occupants, and their delivery to one of two* puntos de tenientes ["holding points"]*, places of confinement, torture, and execution.*

But most new members did not have a military pedigree, instead being disaffected, soulless youths such as 17-year-old Gabriel Cardona Ramírez of Laredo, Texas, who also joined in 2004 and soon found himself in a Zeta training-camp along with 70 other recruits, being "taught combat skills by Colombian mercenaries." Promoted to *sicario* shortly thereafter, he invited 13-year-old friend Rosalio "Bart" Reta to join, who earned the highest scores at training-camp and would be "practically raised by Zetas leader Miguel Ángel Treviño." Neither proved a good soldier, but did carry out dozens of cocaine-stoked murders.

Intelligence reports suggested that inductees were now paid $300 a week, which was doubled after six months' service. And as each individual began to demonstrate particular skills—such as drivers, money launderers, extortionists, etc.—they might be diverted toward such duties and paid more accordingly (such as the gunmen chosen as top bodyguards, who received weekly $1,000 salaries). Ads were even posted and broadcast through the media, seeking volunteers with such formally-written appeals as:

> *The "Zetas" Operational Group wants you, military or ex-military man. We can offer you good pay, food, and amenities for your family. Don't suffer any more abuse or hunger.*

By accepting into their ranks ex-policemen, career criminals, convicts, and psychopathic teenagers attracted by the fierce Zeta reputation, the company soon numbered more than 300 men, although lacking the original cadre's skills and discipline. Nevertheless, coupled with the Gulf Cartel's other *sicarios*—such as "El Coss" Costilla's *Los Sierras*, Tony Tormenta's *Escorpiones*, and "El Goyo" Sauceda's

Grameros—plus their unlimited supply of high-powered modern military ordnance such as Barrett .50-caliber rifles, bazookas, and heavily-armored vehicles with gun turrets, they would be able to defeat Nuevo Laredo's attackers.

War and Change of Command (Winter 2004–2005)

With assistance from Arturo "El Barbas" Beltrán and the Sinaloa Cartel, La Barbie managed to assemble a small army of 500 *sicarios* dubbed "Los Negros" and launch a full-scale onslaught against Nuevo Laredo starting on the morning of September 27, 2004, when teams of young gunmen began emerging from undetected hideouts to shoot up municipal police cars. Both sides then savaged each other in earnest, the Zetas responding to Valdez's escalation by dumping five mutilated bodies in an abandoned house on October 9, 2004, with taunting messages scrawled in black magic-marker: one addressed to "El Chapo" Guzmán and Arturo Beltrán, a second to La Barbie and his lieutenant Lucio "El Sol" Martínez Manríquez. Related actions also occurred, 150 GAFE special-forces and a like number of soldiers from the 21st Military Zone acting on a tipoff to apprehend Gulf Cartel ally "El Tísico" Rosales in a suburb south of Morelia before dawn on Sunday, October 24, 2004.

Then five days later, Zeta leader Rogelio (Z-2) González arrived with his entourage around 9:00 p.m. on October 29, 2004, for the reopening of La Covacha table-dancing bar at the intersection of Laura Villar and Francisco Villa Avenues in the Gulf Cartel stronghold of Matamoros. He was informed soon afterward that traffic had stopped circulating outside, a sign that a police raid was imminent, so he slipped out its rear door to his armored, chauffeur-driven Volkswagen Passat. When 30 Policía Federal Preventiva or "Federal Preventive Police" (PFP) and Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" (AFI) agents stormed the building a few minutes later, he tossed a fragmentation grenade to mask his escape, but his 15 bodyguards became pinned down in a 20-minute firefight that left one AFI agent dead and two PFP policemen wounded—until El Kelín's second grenade-toss exploded prematurely inside his Passat, killing his chauffeur and leaving the Zeta chief injured. Thanks to his ineptitude, the agents secured González Pizaña and his henchmen, clearing the way for the far more formidable Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano to move up and lead the Zetas through some of the bloodiest and darkest years of their criminal history.

Operation "Cuerno de Chivo" (November 2004)

In addition to defending Nuevo Laredo, the now more-numerous Zetas were also able to mount other operations, such as the campaign of terror which a detachment inflicted to ensure the election of the Gulf Cartel's preferred PRI candidates during the state elections on Sunday, November 14, 2004. Army units and AFI agents having been conveniently withdrawn a few days earlier, San Fernando and numerous other municipalities around Matamoros, Miguel Alemán, Camargo, Mier, and Díaz Ordaz discovered heavily-armed *sicarios* loitering outside their polling stations, menacing voters as they approached.

These gunmen were already well-known in San Fernando, having arrived from Matamoros as early as June 2004 to occupy various hotels and estates, from which they would emerge brandishing AK-47s to patrol the streets in convoys of Lincoln or Ford

Lobo pickups and BMW SUVs. On election day, these Zetas used the Laguna Inn Hotel (which once belonged to the state representative Manuel Muñoz Rocha, before his abrupt disappearance) as a base for their criminal intervention, which included distributing filled-in ballots among voters and ordering them to be cast at the corresponding polling-station before returning with an official ballot left blank so as to be paid a 100–500 peso bribe. Street thugs were also "paid" in crack cocaine to threaten uncooperative voters, with Zetas often parked nearby—their AK-47s or *cuernos de chivo* prominently displayed. Intimidated citizens would later bitterly recall this Zeta occupation as Operación "Cuerno de Chivo."

Stillborn Rescue-Plan (December 2004–January 2005)

It had long been rumored that the Zeta raid which Carlos "El Tísico" Rosales led into Apatzingán's CERESO prison on January 5, 2004, had been a test to see if a similar effort might free Osiel Cárdenas from La Palma Penitentiary. This possibility was given greater credence during summer 2004, when it was learned that Rosales was again training a Zeta company at La Tupitina Ranch on Michoacán's coast (the same site where they had prepared for their Apatzingán mission). An Army detachment visited but found only "many people dressed in black," detaining some, although no charges could be laid. Inmate unrest was meanwhile brewing within the penitentiary itself, fueled by Cárdenas and Benjamín Arellano, so that the worried new *Secretario de Seguridad Pública* or "Public-Safety Secretary," Ramón Martín Huerta, made a series of personnel changes and system upgrades in August 2004, as well as transferring more than 40 midlevel bosses to other prisons.

"El Tísico" Rosales' arrest on October 24, 2004, temporarily eased official concerns, yet it was learned next month that the Zeta "Mamito" (Z-7) Rejón had resumed training 50 *sicarios* to attempt a rescue in December 2004. More ominously, Cárdenas had allegedly authorized the purchase of two helicopters, one of which was to be armor-reinforced and painted jet-black, speculation being that it was intended to swoop down into La Palma's prison yard for a nocturnal extraction, while the second was to speed the freed cartel-chief to Las Alicias Ranch in Coroneo, Guanajuato, from where he would disappear into South America. But December came and went with the prison staff on full alert, yet nothing transpired.

Finally, inmate recalcitrance climaxed on January 13, 2005, when 350 prisoners proclaimed a "hunger strike," so that frightened guards imposed a lockdown and requested outside help. By five o'clock next morning, more than 100 soldiers, 400 *Fuerzas Federales de Aapoyo* or "Federal Support Forces" (FFA—military personnel in plainclothes), and 100 AFI agents appeared with 18 armored personnel-carriers and dozens of Hummers to reimpose order. Any hopes of staging an escape having been scuttled, the Gulf Cartel spitefully retaliated by having six CEFERESO employees in Matamoros abducted as they left work on January 19 by a group of men—presumably Zetas—who set up a fake military roadblock nearby. Their tortured bodies, blindfolded and with bound hands, were found in an SUV parked outside that prison's entrance next morning.

Renewed Long-Range Strikes (May–August 2005)

The authorities had noticed how Zetas vanished into a much less prominent role in

Nuevo Laredo following Lazcano's succession as their leader in November 2004, delegating lower-level auxiliaries to perform such mundane duties as street patrols and guarding Gulf Cartel properties, while reconcentrating its elite company for precision counterstrikes. Violence gradually settled into fitful outbursts, slowed by such measures as the 1,500 PFP reinforcements sent into Tamaulipas in February 2005. Once Milenio efforts started to flag and the Sinaloans began intervening more openly in the fighting, some Zeta squads resumed forays deep into enemy territory. During the first week of May 2005, a four-man undercover *destacamento de seguridad* or "security detail" was dispatched to abduct Sinaloa Cartel members from their distant Acapulco *plaza*, as well as a five-man team to do the same at Zihuatanejo. Both groups were caught and put to death, their interrogator "La Barbie" Valdez—embittered by the recent execution of his brother Armando at Zeta hands—recording their confessions and posting these executions online. [For greater detail on this atrocity, see "Mata Zetas or Matazetas."]

As fighting continued in Nuevo Laredo that summer, the Zetas came to be blamed for the murder of 56-year-old print-shop owner Alejandro Domínguez Coello, who bravely volunteered for its vacant position of chief of municipal police on the morning of June 8, 2005, only to be shot dead within six hours by a hit squad toting AR-15s—although his killers were most likely Negros targeting Gulf Cartel collaborators. Pressure from a worried U.S. ambassador nonetheless spurred the Fox administration into flying in 250 GAFE special-forces from Matamoros three days later, who paraded into Nuevo Laredo in 32 military vehicles and dispersed around the city (backed by 600 federal agents). These newcomers were greeted by gunfire from local police, so that federal officials removed almost one-third of the municipal force for their evident ties to drug traffickers, while suspending the rest and replacing them with federal agents. This wholesale substitution was widely viewed as ineffectual in halting the violence, as gun-battles persistently erupted between Gulf Cartel forces and the Negros.

Lazcano's Zetas suddenly launched another cross-country strike against the Milenio leadership just past midnight (12:45 a.m.) on August 2, 2005, while 250 guests were gathered at El Carril horse-racing track in the municipality of Tonalá, Jalisco. Two fragmentation-grenades lobbed out of the darkness into a crowd of 100 or so bettors congregated in its *palenque* or "cock-fighting pit" killed four people and maimed or wounded another 27. The supposition of Zeta involvement was seemingly confirmed two days later, when a telephoned tip of armed men seen driving around the municipality of Uruapan in two Dodge Ram quad-cab pickups without license-plates resulted in these interlopers' detentions. Officials surmised that their ten uncooperative prisoners might be Zetas, noting the *sicarios*' expensive military-grade firearms—including the latest German Heckler & Koch HK-91 semiautomatic assault rifles—while recording their names as:

- Eduardo García Salas and Juan Armando López Gallegos, originally from the port-city of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán
- Luis Fernando Sáenz Gutiérrez and David Mendoza [or Méndez] Barajas from Uruapan
- Juan García Arreola and Raúl López Ibarra from La Huacana, Michoacán
- Audel Alemán Flores from Apatzingán
- Joaquín Guillén Miranda from Guerrero

- Víctor Manuel Maravilla Torres from Acámbaro, Guanajuato
- Carlos Rojas Díaz from Puebla

But when menacing phone-calls demanding these detainees' release began to be received as soon as they were deposited at PGR headquarters in Morelia, officials were left in no further doubt, so that 50 soldiers were brought in with four Hummers to act as extra guards overnight, and more than 50 Army, federal, and state police vehicles manned by hundreds of personnel escorted the captives to Morelia's airport on August 5, 2005, to be flown to Mexico City.

Savage War for Acapulco (August 2005–September 2006)

Almost simultaneously, another Zeta hit-squad had struck in the Sinaloans' Acapulco *plaza* that same evening of August 2, 2005, by intercepting and murdering Julio Carlos López Soto, assistant director of Guerrero's Policía Investigadora Ministerial or "Ministerial Investigative Police" (PIM) as he was departing from a dinner with reporters at a popular restaurant. Three days later, these attackers released his police escort—beaten but otherwise unharmed—who dutifully relayed a message from his bed "on the fifth floor of Santa Lucía Hospital" to a press conference, quoting acting Gulf Cartel leader Antonio Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén: "They told me to tell you (the media) that they are already here in Guerrero, with 120 Zeta fighting-men from Tamaulipas; and send along greetings from Mr. Goyo Sauceda, and long live Tamaulipas!" [Gregorio "El Goyo" Sauceda Gamboa having succeeded González Pizaña as commander of the Gulf Cartel *sicarios*.]

Hit-and-run attacks began against local dealers, stash houses, shipments, and auxiliaries throughout this resort city and environs, until its Sinaloan *plaza*-chief, Carlos Esteban Landeros Sánchez, was slain in February 2006. Arturo Beltrán thereupon appointed La Barbie as his new *plaza*-chief for Acapulco, with instructions to raise a new paramilitary force and respond in kind. The bitter personal animosity which Valdez felt against Miguel Treviño was to make the ensuing fight more inhumane than usual. For example, the heads of two Zetas would be found dangling on a wall in Acapulco on April 21, 2006, one belonging to Érik Juárez Martínez, a native of Nuevo Laredo, whose decapitated body was later found with a "Z" carved painfully into his back; another was left on its Palacio Municipal staircase on June 29, 2006, belonging to Hugo Carpio Herrera, who had resigned from the special-forces only that previous year to join the Zetas. Yet despite such repeated acts of bestiality, neither side could defeat the other or permanently conquer territory, so that Zeta interest gradually shifted elsewhere—especially after the eccentric Familia Michoacana rose to challenge their lucrative occupation of neighboring Michoacán in September 2006. [For greater details on this bloody struggle, see "Valdez Villarreal, Édgar 'La Barbie': Savage Defense of Acapulco."]

Meanwhile, other Zeta detachments had been dispatched on Gulf Cartel orders to escort gangs of PRI *brigadistas* or "party loyalists" on the night of May 21, 2006, as they destroyed every PAN poster or placard that they could find in Tampico, Ciudad Madero, Altamira, Reynosa, Matamoros, Camargo, Miguel Alemán, and Aldama prior to the national elections of July 2—although their Sinaloan foes countered by assaulting or abducting PRI operatives, beating poll workers, vandalizing offices, etc. In Nuevo Laredo, gun-battles between

Zetas and "the so-called Negros, who are *sicarios* in the service of the Sinaloa Cartel commanded by 'El Chapo' Guzmán," were still being reported as late as July 2006. And the Zetas' lingering presence in Michoacán was confirmed when the military apprehended three former Guatemalan soldiers and five presumed Zetas in September 2006 in Aguililla, equipped with 12 AK-47s and AR-15s; one 9-mm pistol; 3,000 rounds of ammunition; three fragmentation-grenades; and black fatigues, tactical vests, and ten Kevlar ballistic helmets.

"La Expansión" (2007)

Osiel Cárdenas was finally extradited to the United States on January 19, 2007, greatly diminishing his directives ordering Zeta actions from behind bars, while a truce was reached that same May between the Sinaloa Cartel field-commander Arturo Beltrán and Miguel Treviño, ending two years of futile battling for Nuevo Laredo. Now titleholders of that border-city's valuable *plaza*, and with less demands for their services from the new Gulf Cartel leader Tony Tormenta or wartime commander Lazcano, Miguel Treviño was able to fly to Mexico City as early as June 15 to initiate independent Zeta negotiations with Colombian cocaine-suppliers. The recently-joined Army veteran Nabor "El Debora" Vargas—who had been apprehended along with 20 companions in April 2007 after a shootout in Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche—had already mapped out a strategic network of roads from Cancún, Quintana Roo, which the Zetas intended to secure so as to transport their South American loads overland. Ambitious members who wished to participate in this endeavor began fanning out in a movement that would be remembered as *La Expansión*, advance contingents soon appearing as far south as Guatemala.

But many other idled Zetas preferred pursuing their own criminal designs, dispersing into adjacent states to seek their fortunes, in the process creating their own new cells by absorbing subsidiary gangs or recruiting local criminals—designating these questionable inductees as "Zetas," despite their lack of any military skills or discipline. And not all Zetas were even that self-motivated: Federal Police reported the detention of 11 veterans on January 13, 2008, who had simply been using an auto workshop to dismantle stolen cars in San Pedro de las Colonias, Coahuila, relieving them of 23 walkie-talkies, 17 cell-phones, nine cars, one motorcycle, 28 kilos of marijuana, plus five semiautomatic rifles and a shotgun, revolver, and rifle. The town's police chief and four of his officers were also arrested.

This dispersal of Zetas into widely-scattered autonomous groups would make any future concerted actions or collaborative efforts progressively more difficult to achieve, resulting in a diluted and disjointed agglomeration that would eventually be incapable of forming alliances with other cartels, as they lacked the necessary internal structure and unison of their paramilitary predecessors.

Guatemalan Invasion (2007–2010)

The Gulf Cartel had already been operating in this Central American country for some time, recognizing it as an important waystation along the long narcotic routes radiating from Colombia. U.S. government analysts would estimate that more than a ton of cocaine passed through Guatemala every day during 2007; it was also the tipping-point along this transportation network, where a kilo of pure cocaine was still a relative bargain, prices doubling by the time that it reached Mexico. Zeta operatives

therefore began appearing that same year in Cobán, capital of Guatemala's Department of Alta Verapaz, even offering to allow local smugglers to buy in on the loads which they would be bringing up from South America.

These interlopers also forged an alliance with local Guatemalan crime-boss Horst Walther "El Tigre" Overdick, who had nearly been assassinated by the dominant León family when he tried to take over the lucrative Zacapa smuggling-corridor. Now bolstered by Zeta gunmen—possibly even including Miguel (Z-40) Treviño himself—Overdick arranged an encounter with the León forces outside a restaurant in Río Hondo, both sides arriving in multicar caravans for an epic shootout on March 25, 2008. Armed with modern assault-rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, the Zetas helped Overdick overwhelm his opponents, killing their leader, Juan "Juancho" León, and ten of his bodyguards, while leaving scorched cars and corpses littered about the scene.

In the wake of this brutal intrusion, small Zeta squads began imposing a reign-of-terror throughout that impoverished region, and by 2008 pirate radio-stations were openly broadcasting ads for ex-military men to "provide security to vehicles carrying goods to Mexico." The Zeta goal of securing these supply-lines even extended into the Mexican tourist resorts of Quintana Roo, where retired General Mauro Enrique Tello Quiñones had assumed command of a special police task-force in late January 2009, intended to combat drug-related violence in Cancún. His tenure lasted only a week, before the general and two aides were abducted and sadistically slain in early February (Tello having both arms and legs broken while being subjected to ghastly, prolonged torture). This atrocity shocked Mexico, the governor of Quintana Roo calling it "truly horrible;" even by the cruel standards of the drug war, this crime stood out for its bestiality—a Zeta hallmark.

Next month, Guatemalan officials located a Zeta training-camp outside Quiché, a town in the central highlands near the Mexican border in March 2009, whose two commanders and 37 recruits fled while leaving behind a staggering cache of grenades, high-powered rifles, and ammunition, plus a hidden airstrip. Police speculated that a series of bus attacks in the national capital earlier that month had been organized by the Zetas as a distraction from their jungle drug-flights. President Álvaro Colom and his top security adviser, Carlos Menocal, could do little more than announce the creation of a toothless *Fuerza de Intervención Aérea, Antinarcótica y Terrorismo* or "Aerial, Anti-Narcotic, and Terrorism Intervention Force" (FIAAT), comprised of 24 police agents and 25 officers drawn from the Guatemalan Air Force and Navy, to be trained by the U.S. Border Patrol's Tactical Unit (BORTAC). But after a deadly shoot-out in Guatemala City in April 2009, hundreds more grenades and ammunition boxes were found that had originally come from Guatemalan Army stores—whether stolen, bought illegally through a corrupt third party, or obtained directly from military officers remaining unknown.

Even after having split from the Gulf Cartel and plunged into civil war in northern Mexico, Zeta cells in Guatemala remained brazenly insolent: on the morning of December 27, 2010, a DJ at La Buena radio-station in Cobán—under threat that its building would be burned down and employees slaughtered if an announcement was not read live over the air within one hour—relayed this:

> *. . . message to the president of Guatemala. We are the Zetas group, and we just wanted the country to know that President Álvaro Colom received $11,500,000 before elections ended. He will pay for failing to comply, be it* [through] *guilty or innocent* [people]. *We will start a war in this country, in malls, in schools, and in police stations in this country. These will be the payments of the $11,500,000 that the president owes . . .*

The communication ended: "Comply with your promises, or fight against the beast."

See also: Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel: Detention in Mexico and the United States; Cuinis, Los: Leadership Role Exposed; Familia Michoacana Cartel; Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie": Offensives to Reclaim Nuevo Laredo et seq.

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Zeta Cartel (2010–2014). Third phase in this group's evolution, when its sheer size and brute strength—numbers swelling to 10,000 men through indiscriminate recruitments—allowed it to stop serving as the Gulf Cartel spearhead and strike out on its own.

Rising Tensions (December 2008–March 2009)

The Zetas' increasingly uncomfortable subordination to the Gulf Cartel had been aggravated by the contributions of millions of dollars required on behalf of the incarcerated Osiel Cárdenas. Then while visiting "El Atorón" Ranch on business in the municipality of Santa María del Río, San Luis Potosí, Zeta commander Heriberto Lazcano was surprised by a Policía Federal raid at 6:00 a.m. on December 5, 2008. Although four of his retainers were captured, along with an impressive array of weaponry, the 33-year-old Lazcano managed to flee into the surrounding bush and remain hidden over the next three days, despite lacking food or water. Upon reemerging, he would order the murders of everyone who had known beforehand about his scheduled visit.

More wary and distrustful than ever, Lazcano would draw aside Cárdenas' dealmaker Juan Jesús Guerrero Chapa at a meeting early next year to say that he had learned the imprisoned boss was bartering information about his subordinates with his

DEA captors, so that Lazcano "had his suspicions that he was being set up"—especially since the raid on El Atorón had come so shortly after he had spoken by phone with the new Gulf Cartel leader Eduardo "El Coss" Costilla. If it was true that a betrayal was being contemplated and he were ever taken, Lazcano added ominously to Guerrero Chapa: "then an internal war would begin between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel, which the Gulf Cartel could not win."

Conquest of Coahuila (2009—2010)

Since their formation, the Zetas had been based in Tamaulipas, before extending their influence down the coast through Veracruz as far as Guatemala. They also gained a foothold at Torreón in southwestern Coahuila, as an advance bulwark against the powerful Sinaloa Cartel in neighboring Durango. Thirsting for their own territories to exploit, Zetas began edging into Coahuila—initially by targeting local drug-traffickers, a longtime resident later recalling:

> *When the Zetas arrived, they recruited everyone to work for them. All the* narcos *in the area had to work for the Zetas. There were no more independent groups. Before they came, Coahuila had been a kind of free market: anyone who wanted to, could operate here. The Téjas* [based in Nuevo Laredo] *were here; Chapo* [Joaquín Guzmán, head of the Sinaloa cartel] *was here. It was wide open. But the Zetas arrived, and they killed Omar Rubio of the Téjas. They killed Vicente Lafuente* [Guereca, longtime local crime boss]. *They killed a few other important people. And everyone who was left joined them.*

But unlike other cartels, these invaders did not just dominate drug-traffic passing through the region; rapacious members soon began threatening every other kind of criminal enterprise, menacing small-time dealers in contraband, pirated CDs, prostitution, street drug-sales, after-hour clubs, etc., into becoming partners—victims knowing that they either had to comply or risk a slow, gruesome death. From there, the unrestrained *sicarios* pushed into legitimate businesses as well, Mayor Fernando Purón of Piedras Negras remembering:

> *There was a point at which we started to see signs that* [the Zetas] *had begun a kind of hegemonic takeover of all commercial activities. In addition to trafficking drugs and weapons, they began to start companies and businesses in the service sector, in real estate, in construction. For example, they began operating money-exchange houses at the border, to exchange dollars for pesos. They staged concerts and dances. They opened restaurants, bars and red-light districts. They got into buying and selling used cars. Then they turned to bigger businesses. They began building shopping malls, hotels, and casinos.*
>
> *And they began living here. After a while, their children began attending schools with your children. Don't think they were living on the outskirts in some ranch. They lived right here in front of city hall. In fact, from this balcony I can point to one of the houses where they lived. Everyone was afraid of them. The Zetas were stronger than the government, you understand? They were economically stronger. They were better organized. They were better armed. Everyone was afraid of them, and those who weren't afraid had been bought by them.*

A common threat made by Zeta extortionists, according to Saltillo merchants, was: "a thousand pesos or three fingers." And their takeover of Coahuila would be completed once they broke with the Gulf Cartel

in January 2010, only to discover—much to their surprise—that they could not defeat their former Tamaulipecan bosses, and so spread out across the remainder of Coahuila.

Civil War (January 2010–September 2011)

Tensions between the Gulf Cartel and ever-more-unruly Zetas burst with the murder of Sergio "El Concorde" Peña Mendoza, who had been personally selected by Lazcano and Miguel Ángel Treviño to transfer north from Chiapas and replace Jaime "El Hummer" González Durán as Zeta underboss at Reynosa. It came as a surprise when this newcomer encountered a Policía Federal checkpoint on Décima Street in Las Fuentes neighborhood on March 14, 2009, and was captured after his Ford King Ranch pickup with Texas license-plates was chased through Reynosa's streets. Police found an AK-47 inside El Concorde's vehicle, seemingly portending a lengthy prison stay.

But it was contrived for Peña Mendoza to be released by the end of that same year, only to then be taken up again off a Reynosa street on January 18, 2010—this time by Gulf Cartel *sicarios* sent by Samuel (Metro 3) Flores Borrego, allegedly on instructions from "El Coss" Costilla. Flores closely interrogated his captive to determine where Peña's loyalties lay, and when El Concorde refused to abjure the Zetas, he was brutally beaten and put to death. Furious, Lazcano sent a *narcomensaje* to the cartel leaders which read:

> *Send us the murderers of my friend, sons of whores. You have until January 25* [2010] *to do so. If you don't cooperate, there will be war.*

When the Gulf Cartel failed to respond, the Zetas dispatched several hit-squads that abducted and murdered 16 *sicarios* defending Miguel Alemán on January 30, 2010, by way of revenge.

Hostilities exploded openly by the last week of February 2010, with shootouts and grenade attacks occurring in Valle Hermoso, Reynosa, Guerrero, Miguel Alemán, Ciudad Mier, and Valadeces, leaving at least 23 dead. Local news-reports on March 2, 2010, indicated that Zeta forces had retreated toward Nuevo Laredo, 150 miles farther west, apparently intending to secure that city as their base-of-operations:

> *The U.S. Consulate-General's office has already confirmed a gun-battle in Nuevo Laredo. It's happening near Boulevard Colosio and the city's zoo. The Consulate-General's office is telling all U.S. citizens to take shelter until the fighting stops. Sources say that the Zetas are already calling in reinforcements. We're told 700 Zetas from around Mexico are joining the 500 already brought into the area last week.*

Surprised at the strength of Gulf Cartel resistance (plus their own unsuspected debility), the Zetas settled into a struggle for control over the drug-smuggling routes traversing the region, ambushing and hijacking each other's moneymaking consignments. Small armies of gunmen clashed regularly as far as Tampico and northern Veracruz, while Zetas custom-built "monster tanks" to protect their loads and transport *sicarios* along the roads branching out from the municipality of San Fernando, about 70 miles south of the U.S. border. [For greater details, see "Narcotanques."] Indiscriminate fighting would flare up and die down in cities as well, one shell-shocked Nuevo Laredo reporter describing an:

> *. . . "ebb and flow" throughout 2010 of "big acts of violence, followed by spillover*

violence over the next few days, followed by an Army or Marines counter-operation that would capture and kill a lot of criminals—Zetas most of the time, and every now and then a big-time Zeta cell-leader or jefe de plaza *would get killed or captured."*

But for civilians and civic officials, this cyclical "violence never really calmed down."

Lacking the Gulf Cartel's aerial and maritime access to South American cocaine, the Zetas' income declined, leading desperate members to cruelly prey upon civilians within their own territory through robberies and horrific kidnappings. One shockingly egregious Zeta atrocity was committed on August 22, 2010, when 72 poor migrants—circling around on a rural road to avoid a military highway-checkpoint—"were stopped by an unknown number of organized-crime figures and transported under guard to San Fernando." An Ecuadorian male survivor later described how they were offered work as Zeta *sicarios*, and after all but one turned down this proposal, 54 men and 15 women were massacred on a Zeta sub-commander's orders. Naval special-forces found the bodies in an abandoned barn two days later; and on August 26, the director of San Fernando's municipal police was also found dead along with other unidentified bodies, one of which was believed to be the state prosecutor.

[Eventually, 196 bodies would be discovered in mass graves outside San Fernando, resulting in the arrests of 17 of its 25 police officers. The military furthermore disarmed every municipal and traffic policemen in all but one of Tamaulipas's 43 municipalities during the second week of May 2011, to determine if any of their weapons had been used in the commission of crimes—the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros reporting on May 13 that the seizure of 460 firearms had left that border-city's 700 officers without any weapons.]

The Gulf Cartel also experienced difficulties, its co-leader Tony Tormenta being killed in a massive shootout against *marinos* on November 5, 2010, so that cells began breaking away and his beleaguered partner, "El Coss" Costilla, forged an alliance with La Familia Michoacana, creating a temporary entity dubbed the Nueva Federación—which at least secured scores of *sicario* reinforcements, helping launch a counteroffensive in early 2011 targeting municipal and rural policemen throughout Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, most of whom were still working for the Zetas. According to PGR files PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS /323/2009 and PGR/SIEDO/UEIDCS /258/2009, only 11 of the original 34 Zeta founders remained criminally active by January 2011: Heriberto Lazcano, Carlos Vera Calva, Daniel Enrique "El Chocotorro" Márquez Aguilar, Galdino Mellado Cruz, Gonzalo "El Cuije" Gerezano Escribano, Jesús Enrique "El Mamito" Rejón, Lucio "El Lucky" Hernández, Rogelio Guerra Ramírez, Prisciliano Ibarra Yepis, Eduardo Estrada González, and Jorge "El Chuta" López, an expert in martial arts and explosives. That same March 2011, Miguel Ángel and Oscar Treviño unleashed packs of vicious young Zeta thugs in an inhumane purge of defenseless civilians in Allende and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, to avenge a betrayal by three local traffickers. [For greater detail, see "Allende Massacre."]

The most hated gang in Mexico and shorn of their former paramilitary prowess, outlying Zeta cells found themselves subjected to additional attacks during the summer of 2011 by the Sinaloa Cartel, and their newly-emergent Jalisco New Generation

allies—the latter publicly assuming the old mantle of *Mata Zetas* or "Zeta Killers" before launching an incursion into Veracruz, conducting numerous executions. [See "Mata Zetas or Matazetas: Jalisco Nueva Generación Revival."] With the Gulf and Zeta Cartels feebly locked in struggle, a savage new twist was added in the *penal de Altamira*—a medium-security state prison formally known as the Centro de Ejecución de Sanciones de Altamira or "Altamira Penal-Sanctions Center"—in Estación Colonias near Ciudad Madero and Tampico. Originally designed to house 1,600 inmates, it was rumored to be holding more than 3,000—although authorities would later insist that only 1,100 were present—when a pack of Zeta convicts charged from Cell Block 11 into the adjacent Cell Block 12 at mid-afternoon on January 4, 2012, killing at least 31 Gulf Cartel prisoners with "makeshift knives, clubs, and even stones," plus wounding 13 more before its officials could summon help and restore order.

A second vicious fight broke out at 2:00 a.m. on Sunday, February 19, 2012, in Apodaca's Centro de Readaptación Social or "Social Re-adaptation Center" (CERESO), a small suburb just north of Monterrey in the Escobedo municipality. Imprisoned Zeta and Gulf Cartel members from overcrowded Cell Blocks C and D—originally intended to hold 350–400 prisoners apiece, but in reality housing 750 each, this 1,500-man prison's total population standing at 2,735 inmates—clashed in its inner courtyard with improvised weapons. The 18 night-guards were powerless to intervene, so that three hours of brutal violence ensued, leaving 44 dead (mostly Gulf Cartel members) before any relief could arrive. Once order was restored, it was furthermore discovered that 37 Zeta inmates had escaped past Watchtower Six immediately prior to this riot, disappearing into the night. The warden, Gerónimo Miguel Andrés Martínez, was dismissed along with two deputies, while the state governor vainly offered a 10 million-peso reward for any escapee's arrest. [He also protested to Mexico City, more than 60 percent of this overcrowded facility's convicts being federal prisoners who should have been housed elsewhere.]

With their South American supply-lines disrupted and losing territory on all sides, the increasingly desperate Zetas perpetrated yet another heartless atrocity when 49 bodies in garbage bags—most harmless Central American migrants with their heads, hands, and feet hacked off—were found callously dumped on Highway 40 in the municipality of Cadereyta-Jiménez, Nuevo León, at dawn on Sunday, May 13, 2012. An online video posted later showed shadowy gunmen tossing out these mutilated remains, then unfurling a *narcomanta* which claimed this brutality on behalf of the Zetas as some incomprehensible gesture directed against their Gulf and Sinaloan rivals. After four days of inquiries, the authorities arrested regional Zeta boss Daniel Jesús "El Loco" Elizondo Ramírez in a Monterrey suburb on May 17, 2012, charging him with this grotesque mass-murder after he allegedly confessed to being ordered by Miguel Ángel Treviño to deposit these corpses in Cadereyta's main square, although—nervous about entering that town on such a mission—he instead scattered them on its nearby highway. Only 14 of these hapless victims have ever been identified, and no arrests made.

Fragmentation and Decline (2012–Present)

Early on the morning of June 1, 2012, *narcomantas* were hoisted in Zacatecas and

Monterrey, complaining on behalf of Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano of the treachery of his cartel partner Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño, attributing the numerous deaths and arrests and declining fortunes of their paramilitary group to deliberate betrayals aimed at weeding out Treviño's rivals. Six days later, this message was repeated on a truck's door, left parked with 14 festering bodies outside the municipal offices in Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas. Although disgruntled with his situation, Lazcano did not condone the *narcomantas*' challenging proclamation, nor act upon it, while Treviño's brother José (Z-41) was betrayed to U.S. authorities and arrested for money laundering on June 12, 2012.

Zeta strength had become so depleted that when the Sinaloa Cartel prepared to assault its garrison holding the vital border-city of Piedras Negras, its defenders could bring in only 130 reinforcements and were reduced to extracting additional "volunteers" from its CERESO prison (which they controlled) on September 17, 2012. They even roamed the streets, carrying off young civilians to swell their ranks, after receiving only the most rudimentary training with high-powered weaponry. This patchwork force of 500 men dug in along Piedras Negras' southern front, erecting rooftop sniper-nests and other strongpoints, plus roadblocks on the only two highways, which they allowed to remain open: one leading toward the distant state-capital of Saltillo, the other toward Ciudad Acuña. The state police flew in 200 *Grupo de Armas y Tácticas Especiales* or "Special Weapons and Tactics Group" (GATE) special-forces from Saltillo aboard a couple of planes, who—knowing themselves to be outnumbered and outgunned—simply took up defensive positions within the city's Centro de Salud or "Health Center" and braced to hold on.

As the date for this projected assault dawned on September 26, 2012, municipal authorities declared a state of siege and imposed a dawn-to-dusk curfew, while federal officials declared martial law as evening fell. Heavy fighting erupted overnight, and International Bridge Number 2 leading across the Rio Grande into Eagle Pass, Texas, was closed at 10:30 next morning when a live explosive was found on the U.S. side. An American journalist phoned some of his Mexican contacts that same September 27 and reported:

> *I reached my associates in Piedras Negras to inquire how the situation is today. I was told all is calm for the time being, but people are in extreme fear. Though the government advises* [everyone] *to stay indoors as much as possible, people are moving about and going to work and living their normal lives. I was very surprised to learn from an associate who is the chief of education for the region, but based in Piedras Negras, that schools* [are] *in session. She asked for permission from Saltillo to close the schools until Friday or Monday, but was told most parents worked and* [therefore] *had no place to leave their children, so schools would be better* [refuges] *than being left home alone.*

This onslaught had otherwise gone largely unreported to the outside world by its terrified populace, media, and civic authorities. [Almost simultaneously in the distant city of San Luis Potosí, a *marino* patrol guided by U.S. intelligence had apprehended Iván (Z-50) "El Talibán" Velázquez, leader of the renegade Zetas who controlled Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, parts of Guanajuato and Coahuila, as well as Monterrey.]

In the aftermath of El Chapo's probing attack, José Treviño's son and the nephew of Miguel Ángel Treviño apparently engaged a heavily-armed GATE patrol in

Piedras Negras' Colonia Lomas del Norte at 4:40 p.m. on October 3, 2012, who promptly riddled the young man's gray Jeep Grand Cherokee and killed him along with his four accompanying *sicarios*. Enraged by his death, Lazcano impulsively ordered the retaliatory abduction and murder of young José Eduardo "Lalo" Moreira (a nephew of Tamaulipas Governor Rubén Moreira Valdez), who was lured to a meeting in Ciudad Acuña three hours later, his lifeless body being discovered by 10:00 p.m. that same night. Next dawn, another *narcomensaje* appeared in Tamaulipas' state capital, reading: *sobrino por sobrino* or "nephew for nephew."

Death of Heriberto Lazcano (October 2012)

Whether a coincidence or not, four days later at 1:30 on Sunday afternoon, October 7, 2012, a tough *marino* patrol—acting on phoned complaints about armed men roaming around a rural baseball-field near Sabinas in the lawless municipality of Progreso, Coahuila [about 80 miles west of Laredo, Texas]—arrived to investigate. This semi-abandoned town had had no municipal police force since January 2012 because local officers had refused to submit to the background checks and vetting procedures required; the area around its diamond was also known as one of only two spots in town with a reliable cell-phone signal.

As the *marinos* approached, someone tossed grenades at them from a moving vehicle, slightly wounding one special-forces member. The car fled for a short distance through the fierce counter-barrage before its driver was killed, at which point Lazcano jumped out with an AR-15 fitted with a grenade launcher, trying to shoot his way free. He too fell some 300 yards away. Unaware of whom they had killed and in the absence of any Servicio Médico Forense or "Forensic Medical Service" (SEMEFO) facility in the area, the *marinos* carried his body at 6:00 p.m. to Progreso's García funeral home, where it was photographed and fingerprinted. By the time that his corpse was identified as Lazcano, an armed band of his loyal Zeta followers had forced their way inside the mortuary early on Monday morning, October 8, 2012, to reclaim his body. This disappearance at first caused some people to doubt this action's veracity, but confirmation soon arrived from multiple sources.

Capture of the Treviño Morales Brothers (June 2013–March 2015)

It is believed that the Mexican government secretly requested special assistance from U.S. intelligence and relaxed its jurisdictional restrictions by providing one-time written consent for an American drone to make over-flights into northern Mexico, so as to help track the erratic movements out of Nuevo Laredo of vicious Zeta Cartel leader Miguel Ángel (Z-40) Treviño. Grown paranoid and fearful, he had taken to traveling fitfully along unpaved rural back-roads in Coahuila and Tamaulipas, accompanied only by small escorts, while restricting visits to family members such as his infant son and known associates.

But once identified by the tireless drone, it became a simple matter to track Treviño's silver-gray pickup as it was being driven at dawn of June 15, 2013, across an open stretch of dirt road 13 miles southwest of Nuevo Laredo (near the town of Anáhuac on the Tamaulipas-Nuevo León border), and—in a joint operation with the DEA—for a Mexican Navy Black Hawk helicopter to suddenly roar down in front of this vehicle and force it to halt. Miguel Ángel Treviño took off running into the

underbrush, but the *marinos* quickly ran him down, while his two bodyguards tamely surrendered. Eight assault-rifles were found inside his pickup, along with 500 rounds of ammunition, and $2 million in cash.

His brother and successor, Omar (Z-42) Treviño, would be taken less than two years later. According to neighbors, an advance unit of 50 *marinos* and federal policemen started quietly occupying hidden positions about midnight on March 3–4, 2015, 200 yards from a house in the exclusive Colonia Fuentes del Valle neighborhood of San Pedro Garza García, a wealthy suburb of Monterrey. Soldiers arrived some time later, establishing a more far-flung perimeter, only allowing residents with verifiable identity-cards to enter or depart the neighborhood. The original *comando* or "strike group" of naval special-forces and federal agents moved in shortly after 4:00 a.m., securing the drug lord without a shot being fired and leaving the scene in a convoy of vehicles with their captive by 7:55 a.m.

Disintegration (April–November 2015)

The arrest of Omar Treviño marked an end to the Zetas' shaky hierarchy and fragile unity, as only the Nuevo Laredo faction accepted the succession of his 38-year-old nephew, Juan Francisco "El Kiko" Treviño Chávez, most other *plaza* bosses and cells refusing to recognize his title, grown disgruntled by their cartel's palpable decline under his uncles. Los Rojos remained at Reynosa under the reluctant command of Mario "El Gordo" Cárdenas Guillén (younger brother of long-ago Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas), with the unpopular Juan Reyes "Quique" Mejía González as his second-in-command. Five or six more breakaway groups soon sprang up, with names such as *Zetas Sangre Nueva* or "New Blood Zetas," *Sangre Zeta* or "Zeta Blood," etc. Violent disputes ensued, infighting that further weakened overall Zeta influence and precipitated a wholesale contraction of their holdings. Gangs sustained themselves through kidnapping civilians, extortions, car thefts, human trafficking, and whatever drugs they could scrounge or steal.

Because of such widespread fragmentation, Kiko's following became by default the most numerous surviving Zeta group, assuming the title of *Cártel del Noreste* or "Northeastern Cartel" while retaining control over its Nuevo Laredo stronghold and vying to reassert some claims in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí—notwithstanding that Kiko had already fearfully fled to Houston, issuing directives from a safe distance. Another faction which had separated earlier and dubbed itself the Zetas Vieja Escuela or "Old School Zetas" took over southern Tamaulipas and formed an alliance with the Grupo Bravo in its state capital of Ciudad Victoria, while scattered smaller groups and cells tried to continue operating autonomously.

See also: Lazcano Lazcano, Heriberto: Falling-Out with the Gulf Cartel et seq.; *Narcotanques*; Santa Muerte.

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Zeta Vieja Escuela

(2014–Present). Fourth phase in this gang's history, as its members reeled from defeats and disintegration—one splinter group, the self-styled Zetas Vieja Escuela or "Old School Zetas," setting out to revive their founders' original "glory."

Origins (2014–2015)

Realizing that years of brutish occupation and sadistic crimes had made the Zetas the most hated gang in Mexico—with everyone's hand turned against them now that their fortunes had fallen—the Zetas Vieja Escuela (also known as *Zetas de la Vieja Guardia* or "Old Guard Zetas," or simply "ZVE" for Z Vieja Escuela) claimed to aspire for a return of their paramilitary company's original practices, when members concentrated on drug trafficking and related illicit activities, confining any violence to rival *sicarios* and never against the public through robberies, kidnappings, or extortions. Opponents' families were also to be considered inviolate, while territorial jurisdictions were to be generally honored.

The Zeta Vieja Escuela's purported intent was laid out during the first week of November 2014, when their breakaway contingent and a defeated Gulf Cartel faction issued a joint narco-message, declaring that both groups were "no longer fighting amongst themselves" but rather hoped to bring peace to Tamaulipas, reimposing order through a new alliance—grandly self-titled the *Nueva Alianza de la Paz* or "New Alliance of Peace"—and no longer "committing errors" against the public, for which reason they were purging their ranks of predatory felons. This narco-message, signed by "*comandante* R-1 of los Rojos" [Juan Reyes "Quique" Mejía González of Reynosa] and "*comandante* Kelín of the United Zetas" [the former Zeta leader from ten years earlier, Rogelio "El Kelín" González Pizaña, recently released from prison], concluded:

> *Don't worry, don't be paranoid, this shall soon be over. This is a readjustment*

> [reacomodo], *soon the extortions, kidnappings,* derecho de piso *will end. There shall be peace, and all shall live in peace.*

However, the enfeebled condition of both groups precluded any real impact, so that nothing changed, their promulgation of higher moral standards having become a common appeal from cartel leaders—one jaded reporter dismissing such declarations as pretending to be "like modern-day Robin Hoods, if Robin Hood was a cokehead mass-murderer."

One early ZVE adherent—the original Zeta founder Luis Reyes Enrique (Z-12) "El Rex" Velázquez Salazar—was arrested without resistance by *marinos* and Federal Police at 7:20 p.m. on August 11, 2015, at his home near the intersection of Gómez Morín Avenue and Villa Chipinque Streets in San Pedro Garza García, while "El Kelín" González Pizaña himself (after several months of vainly attempting to forge alliances so as to take over the Gulf Cartel *plaza* at Matamoros) was abducted and murdered along with his entire family in late November 2015, their bodies never being found.

Inconclusive Guerra Zeta or "Zeta War" (2016–2017)

The Zetas Vieja Escuela nonetheless retained control over southern Tamaulipas under Omar "El Mono Tonto" (Z-10) Lorméndez, as well as allying in its state capital of Ciudad Victoria with the bloodthirsty Grupo Bravo under Juan Pablo "El Oaxaco" Pérez García [a former 35th Infantry Battalion corporal]. Rogelio "El Rojo" Díaz Cuéllar, who also had close ties to the Gulf Cartel, was appointed ZVE *jefe* or "chief" for that *plaza*. But on March 8, 2016, the main surviving Zeta fragment at Nuevo Laredo under "Kiko" Treviño—now operating as the Cártel del Noreste or "Northeast Cartel" (CDN)—countered by publicly posting *narcomantas* in Ciudad Victoria festooned with a few dead bodies, and in a badly-written statement complained about the willingness of President Enrique Peña's administration to extradite drug-bosses to stand trial in the United States, while also threatening to wrest back control of Ciudad Victoria and southern Tamaulipas from the Zetas VE and Grupo Bravo.

The Old School Zetas responded a few days later with their own *narcomantas*, chastising the CDN for its abusive cruelties against civilians and offering a million-peso reward for "Kiko" Treviño's head (whom they accused of cowering in Nuevo León). Violence surged around Ciudad Victoria, producing scores of deaths—unreported by the authorities, although it was noted that soldiers seemed to concentrate their military counterstrikes against CDN infiltrators, thereby favoring the Zetas Vieja Escuela (who also controlled Ciudad Victoria's municipal police through that force's commander, ex-artillery Lieutenant José Ramón Tirado Galindo). In May 2016, the Federal Subprocuraduría Especializada en Investigación de Delincuencia Organizada or "Specialized Deputy Attorney-General's Office for Organized Crime Investigations" (SEIDO) and Centro Nacional de Planeación, Análisis e Información para el Combate a la Delincuencia or "National Center for Planning, Analysis, and Intelligence in Combating Crime" (CENAPI) in Mexico City issued a joint statement identifying the Gulf and Zeta Cartels' surviving cells as:

Gulf Cartel (2016): Metros, Rojos, Grupo Lacoste, Grupo Dragones, Grupo Bravo, Grupo Pumas, Grupo de Apoyo Ceros,

M3, Fresitas, Los Sierra, Los Pantera, Ciclones, and Los Pelones

Zetas (2016): Sangre Zeta, Grupo Operativo Zeta, Comando Zetas, El Círculo, El Extranjero, Unidad Zeta, Néctar Lima, Grupo Delta Zeta, Fuerzas Especiales Zeta, and Cártel del Noreste

On June 7, 2016, the Old School Zetas posted a video showing their interrogation and gruesome executions of José Wenceslao Gasnares González, a high-ranking Cártel del Noreste member who years before had been a Tamaulipas State Police officer and a Ministerial Police commander in charge of the homicide unit at Nuevo Laredo, along with his wife. But a ZVE leader—the original Zeta founder Luis Reyes Enrique (Z-12) "El Rex" Velázquez Salazar—was then arrested without resistance by *marinos*, plus federal and state police agents at 7:20 p.m. on August 11, 2016, near the intersection of Gómez Morín Avenue and Villa Chipingue Street while driving toward his luxurious home in Monterrey's wealthy suburb of San Pedro Garza García [having only been released from prison in April 2015, on a legal technicality].

By late August 2016, it was being reported that "for more than ten months, two rival factions of the Zetas Cartel have been fighting for control over Tamaulipas," flaring up openly until abductions, drive-by shootings, gun battles, executions, beheadings, and dismemberments had become almost a daily occurrence—especially in Ciudad Victoria. The Old School Zetas furthermore posted a *narcomanta* next month, threatening "every weakling [*panochón*] who is trying to pass himself off as a Zeta" in San Andrés Tuxtla and Catemaco, Veracruz.

During the first week of November 2016, leaders of the Gulf Cartel and Zetas VE met at 11:00 a.m. in downtown Matamoros for a six-hour conference to solidify their *Cárteles Unidos* or "United Cartels" alliance by clarifying each other's respective drug-routes and territories, as well as discussing future actions against their enemies. This gathering was hosted by local Gulf Cartel boss Sergio Cortéz Ortegón and included representatives from Old School Zeta *plazas* scattered throughout Oaxaca, Tabasco, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo. It was agreed that the Gulf Cartel would provide logistical support thanks to its arms imports from Texas, and allow drug-exports through its border-crossings for a nominal fee, in exchange for paramilitary training and *sicarios* from the Zeta Vieja Escuela. According to a participant, both groups had recently conducted a *limpia* or "purge" as well, targeting rogue kidnappers and robbers—some of whom they had recorded being tortured or executed—in an attempt "to return to the times when cartels dedicated themselves exclusively to drug-trafficking, without harming civilians." Surviving cells hanging on in Reynosa under Julián Manuel "Comandante Toro" Loza Salinas had furthermore not been invited to attend this get-together because they still tolerated extortions, kidnappings, and other nontrafficking crimes as a means of supplementing their incomes.

Yet losses continued: "El Oaxaco" Pérez García, leader of Grupo Bravo, was arrested by naval special-forces in Reynosa on January 20, 2017, and flown off for interrogation at SEIDO headquarters in Mexico City. Less than two weeks later, José Luis "El Comandante" Cano Lumbreras—another Zetas VE boss—was incarcerated on February 1, 2017, in the state prison at Ciudad Victoria, where he was smothered three days later by assailants from a rival gang,

while returning from a legal hearing. By March 30, 2017, SEIDO and CENAPI could report that 15 of that previous year's Tamaulipecan cells had virtually ceased to exist, leaving:

Gulf Cartel (2017): Rojos operating out of Reynosa; Metros at Matamoros; Grupo Dragones at Tampico; Fresitas and Ciclones surviving throughout lesser towns in Tamaulipas; Pelones and Talibanes holding Quintana Roo; while seven cells had been largely dismantled: Grupo Lacoste, Grupo Bravo, Grupo Pumas, Grupo de Apoyo Ceros, M3, Los Sierra, and Los Pantera

Zetas (2017): Grupo Operativo Los Zetas, Grupo Operativo Zetas, and Fuerzas Especiales Zetas surviving, federal forces having dealt significant setbacks to eight others: Sangre Zeta, Comando Zetas, El Círculo, El Extranjero, Unidad Zeta, Néctar Lima, Grupo Delta Zeta, and the Cártel del Noreste.

Naval special-forces mounted coordinated strikes on Saturday evening, April 22, 2017, during which they used a helicopter to run down and kill the Gulf Cartel boss "Comandante Toro" in Reynosa, and did the same one hour later to the Old School Zetas boss in Ciudad Victoria, Francisco Javier "Pancho" Carreón Olvera.

After three violence-free months, hostilities revived when a 24-year-old woman's severed head—niece of the regional Zeta underboss holding Coatzacoalcos and southern Veracruz, Hernán "El Comandante H" Martínez Zavaleta—was left lying at dawn in the middle of the highway between Cosoleacaque and Jaltipan, Veracruz on July 21, 2017. A little later that same morning, the bound body of an abducted municipal official was found in Coatzacoalcos' Colonia El Tesorero, his head almost off. The blindfolded, battered body of a young man appeared next, on the grounds of the municipal dump at Agua Dulce, Veracruz—this time with a crudely-written, misspelled message from the Zetas Vieja Escuela, announcing that this time they had united with the Gulf Cartel to jointly wage war against the "traitors" and "turncoats" of the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel, who were penetrating into former Zeta territory in the southern districts of Veracruz.

The ZVE struck again seven days later, leaving the tortured bodies of four women and five men outside the entrance to a residence at the intersection of Abraham Lincoln and Díaz Ordaz Streets in Nuevo Laredo's Colonia Viveros at 8:25 a.m. on July 27, 2017. This house (located only a few yards from the international bridge to Laredo, Texas) belonged to one of the female victims—apparently targeted because she was related to the teenage hellion Pablo César "El Comandante Takia" Álvarez, a reputed Cártel del Noreste underboss—with an accompanying narco-message admonishing this delinquent:

> *What El Takia did to innocent people was paid back in life. Sooner or later, everything must be paid for in this life.*

Six days later, another threatening narco-message signed by Z-47 and Eduardo (Z-33) Mendoza Robles from La Vieja Guardia was circulated on social media, threatening Nuevo Laredo's Cartel del Noreste and citizenry with the words:

> *People of Nuevo Laredo, tell your children to stop frequenting night clubs. All of a sudden, we will throw out grenades and burn down the clubs and everything that finances the Norestitas* ["Northeasterners" or CDN members].

In such brutal fashion, the Zetas Vieja Escuela had returned to the drug wars, soon controlling the central portion of Veracruz around its capital city of Jalapa.

Fuel Thefts (Summer 2017–Present)

During the spring of 2017, some impoverished rural residents of Puebla had discovered a leak in one of many overland pipelines converging near Tehuacán, Huauchinango, Cholula, Ciudad Serdán, and San Martín Texmelucan, owned by the national oil-conglomerate Pemex. Catching this dripping fuel in pails, they enjoyed free gasoline and began selling off the excess, soon attracting more and more buyers. Other communities took notice of this profitable piracy and began deliberately tapping into their own pipelines, so that this practice spread and its profiteers became known as *chupaductos* or "duct suckers" (or *huachicoleros*, an older term for sellers of adulterated spirits, such as watered-down liquors). Drawn by this easy money, local policemen and criminals moved in to extort *derecho de piso* payments from participants to permit them to continue committing such thefts.

Zeta cells left isolated along the Gulf Coast by their cartel's collapse, desperately short of funds and with their drug-traffic disrupted, became attracted to this lucrative sideline as well, and quickly moved in to stake a claim. Brutal enforcers and coerced local gangs launched into a fight for dominance over this illicit commerce, with such typical ferocity that the region encompassing the *poblano* municipalities of Tepeaca, Tecamachalco, Quecholac, and Palmar de Bravo became dubbed the *Triángulo Rojo* or "Red Triangle" by the press, due to rampant lawlessness and bloody violence. Not satisfied with wringing extortion out of scores of defenseless communities, Zeta *sicarios* escalated to hijacking Pemex tanker-trucks and railway tankers, even seizing a few gas stations to operate on their own.

But the Zetas' implacable adversaries—the increasingly powerful Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel—followed them into Puebla and launched their own turf war in October 2017, to wrest these proceeds from Zeta control. Local crime-boss and Zeta ally Roberto "El Bukanas" de los Santos de Jesús soon found his grip loosening over the Red Triangle as his men fled in full-blown retreat. Having encircled the state capital, the CJNG next targeted a half-dozen key municipalities, unfazed by the federal government's counter-deployment of 600 extra troops into this largely depopulated region. Zeta and CJNG infiltration became so pervasive that a state police raid on San Martín Texmelucan's municipal police headquarters on May 2, 2018, took all 185 officers into custody and charged 119—including the chief—with various crimes, finding that most were not even qualified to be police officers. That autumn, Pemex issued a report in September 2018 which indicated that 11,240 pipeline taps had been detected during the first nine months of that year, or about 41 a day.

Lingering Vestiges (2018–Present)

Although scattered into ever-smaller pockets, some Zeta survivors hung on. State and federal authorities offered a 500,000-peso reward on March 10, 2018, for information leading to the arrest of Sergio Enrique "El Cursi" Calderón Quintanilla, *jefe de plaza* for the Zetas Vieja Escuela in southern Veracruz. Four days later, a torched car with a burned, headless corpse was found at dawn on Independencia Street in Colonia Insurgentes of the municipality of Minatitlán, accompanied by a misspelled message

from the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel—offering an additional one million pesos for this same information.

And as recently as the morning of January 9, 2019, authorities searching for a missing man stumbled upon the remnants of a nocturnal battle between Gulf Cartel and Zeta squads near the lonely hamlet of Refugio Hinojosa outside of Ciudad Alemán, Tamaulipas: 24 bodies—15 charred beyond recognition—lying amid a field of burned-out vehicles; and when an Army patrol passed close by that same spot next day, they were fired upon by a group wearing military-style bulletproof vests and camouflage clothing—evidently by mistake, as the soldiers promptly killed five of these assailants.

See also: Jalisco Nueva Generación, Cártel; Noreste, Cártel del.

Further Reading

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Chronology

January 16, 1977
The U.S.-Mexico eradication campaign Operation "Condor" begins in Sinaloa, to destroy narcotics crops in northern Mexico through aerial spraying and Army sweeps.

Late 1977
Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo arranges with Colombian distributor Gonzalo "El Mexicano" Rodríguez Gacha to trans-ship cocaine into the United States for commissions, his profits soon making Félix the wealthiest trafficker in Mexico.

September 1978
With thousands of marijuana and heroin crops being destroyed and hundreds of arrests made, most major Mexican bosses relocate into Guadalajara and begin to collaborate with one another.

Late 1978
The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration begins losing interest in its Mexican eradication-program, instead shifting men and resources to combat the growing amounts of Colombian cocaine entering Florida.

1979
Mexican marijuana and heroin exports resurge.

1980
Two-dozen drug bosses residing in Guadalajara invest in Rafael Caro Quintero's project of establishing huge marijuana-plantations throughout Zacatecas, Durango, and Chihuahua.

November 9, 1984
A raid surprises Caro Quintero's vast grow-operation around Búfalo in southern Chihuahua, destroying 8,500 tons of seedless marijuana worth $2.5 billion. The drug lord angrily vows revenge.

February 7, 1985
DEA agent Enrique Camarena is abducted and savagely tortured to death by Caro Quintero; a furious U.S. administration will impose crushing sanctions on the Mexican government to arrest the Guadalajara Cartel perpetrators.

April 4, 1985
Caro Quintero is apprehended in Costa Rica, as is his senior partner, Ernesto Fonseca, two days later, and the Guadalajara Cartel begins to disintegrate.

October 1987
Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán inaugurates the first "narco tunnel" between Agua

Prieta, Sonora, and Douglas, Arizona; its profits will propel his rise.

April 8, 1989
Guadalajara Cartel "godfather" Félix Gallardo is arrested, and shortly thereafter orders his subordinates to meet and divide up a dozen territories, establishing their own independent cartels.

1990
Denied his title to Tecate's *plaza* by the belligerent Arellanos of Tijuana, "El Chapo" Guzmán gathers several lesser colleagues into a Federación that will become known as the Sinaloa Cartel.

May 24, 1993
An Arellano hit-squad mistakenly kills Cardinal Posadas of Guadalajara, instead of "El Chapo" Guzmán; drug bosses flee into hiding and operations are disrupted.

June 7, 1993
The fugitive El Chapo is arrested in Guatemala and returned to Mexico, being sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.

Summer 1995
The Colombian National Police arrests the Cali Cartel's seven highest-ranking members; shortly thereafter, Juárez Cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes begins buying tons of cocaine directly from South American growers, cutting out these intermediaries.

January 14, 1996
Gulf Cartel leader Juan García Ábrego is unexpectedly arrested, setting off a succession struggle won three years later by Osiel Cárdenas Guillén.

July 3, 1997
Amado Carrillo dies after undergoing a marathon plastic-surgery procedure, being succeeded as Juárez Cartel boss by his brother Vicente.

Summer 1997
350 GAFE soldiers are deployed in Tamaulipas, serving as undercover FEADS field-agents, a couple of dozen deserting to join the Gulf Cartel and found its Zeta paramilitary.

December 1, 2000
Vicente Fox of the opposition PAN Party is inaugurated as president, launching a series of ambitious reforms intended to overhaul Mexico's discredited police agencies, so as to better combat the growing power and influence of violent cartels.

January 19, 2001
El Chapo escapes from Puente Grande prison.

October 2001
Chapo Guzmán persuades 25 other drug bosses to unite into a Federación, which the Arellano Cartel of Tijuana refuses to join, so is soon attacked.

March 2002
Angered by a double cross, Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén sends his new Zeta paramilitary company to attack José Dionisio "El Chacho" Román García's gang in Nuevo Laredo, killing him and seizing control of its smuggling routes within the next couple of months.

November 21–22, 2002
Zeta founder and field-commander Arturo (Z-1) Guzmán Decena is killed in Matamoros.

January 10, 2003
Soldiers storm FEADS's headquarters in Tijuana, and all that agency's offices will be closed across the country by next week.

March 14, 2003
Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas is captured in Matamoros.

June 2004
The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency begins test-flights of its first surveillance-drone, along the Arizona border.

September 11, 2004
Rodolfo "El Niño de Oro" Carrillo Fuentes, younger brother of Juárez Cartel boss Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, is murdered by Chapo Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel in Culiacán, war erupting between both crime syndicates.

October 29, 2004
Rogelio "El Kelín" González Pizaña, head of the Gulf Cartel *sicarios* and Zeta commander, is arrested in Matamoros, being succeeded by Heriberto (Z-3) Lazcano.

December 1, 2006
On his very first day in office, newly elected President Felipe Calderón announces an all-out aggressive war against the cartels, which will score numerous victories, yet unleash more violence. Most Mexicans will attribute their country's unbridled lawlessness to Calderón's shortsighted policy.

January 16, 2007
Pedro Díaz Parada, lifelong leader of the Oaxaca Cartel and a fugitive from justice for 15 years, is arrested.

March 15, 2007
Federal agents raid the luxurious Mexico City home of Chinese-born businessman Zhenli Ye Gon, uncovering $210 million in suspected drug-proceeds.

January 5, 2008
Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán unleashes his Gente Nueva paramilitary force into Ciudad Juárez, plunging that vital border-city into four years of cruel urban warfare.

January 20, 2008
The youngest Beltrán Leyva brother (Alfredo "El Mochomo") is arrested, his family suspecting that their longtime partner Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán has betrayed him.

March 19, 2008
Mexican troops capture Vicente Zambada Niebla, son of Sinaloa Cartel partner Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García.

May 8, 2008
A Beltrán hit-squad assassinates "El Chapo" Guzmán's 22-year-old son, Édgar Guzmán López, in Culiacán.

June 2008
The U.S. Congress approves the "Mérida Initiative," allocating $400 million to purchase helicopters, enhanced telecommunications-equipment, and advanced weaponry for the first year of this "confidential antinarcotics strategy" with Mexico.

December 16, 2009
Naval special-forces kill Arturo Beltrán in Cuernavaca, his Beltrán-Leyva Organization disintegrating within a year.

January 18, 2010
Sergio "El Concorde" Peña Mendoza, Zeta underboss in Reynosa, is abducted and tortured to death by his suspicious Gulf Cartel superiors. Zeta commander Lazcano will angrily demand that his murderers be surrendered or "there shall be war."

February 22, 2010
The Zetas unleash a ferocious campaign against the Gulf Cartel, whose members are strongly ensconced within their border

strongholds of Reynosa and Matamoros, so that fighting rages on inconclusively for the next several months.

Early August 2010
The "Jalisco New Generation" Cartel first appears, which—allied with the Sinaloa Cartel—will quickly rout the Knights Templar and Zetas and drive them out of Jalisco, Colima, northern Michoacán, and Guanajuato, spanning from coast to coast within six months.

December 9, 2010
Policía Federal officers claim to have killed Familia Michoacana spiritual leader Nazario "El Más Loco" Moreno, which President Felipe Calderón announces as an established fact, although he is in fact still alive.

February 15, 2011
Two unarmed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents driving through San Luis Potosí are mistakenly fired upon by Zeta gunmen disguised as soldiers, killing agent Jaime Zapata; both Washington and Mexico City respond angrily, sweeping up hundreds of suspected Zetas.

March 18, 2011
In Allende, Coahuila, pickups disgorge 200 heavily-armed young Zeta thugs, who inflict a terrible punishment upon this region's residents.

June 28, 2011
All municipal police forces in Tamaulipas are disarmed by the Army, and disbanded because of corruption.

April 26, 2012
It is announced that the discredited Agencia Federal de Investigación or "Federal Investigative Agency" will be disbanded within 90 days.

June 1, 2012
Narcomantas appear, complaining on Heriberto Lazcano's behalf of the treacherous conduct of his Zeta Cartel partner, Miguel Ángel Treviño.

October 7, 2012
Lazcano is killed by naval special-forces in Progreso, Coahuila, although—unaware of his identity—the *marinos* deposit his body at a local funeral home, where it will be stolen next morning by his loyal followers.

December 1, 2012
PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto is inaugurated as president, aiming to roll back his predecessor's aggressive all-out war against the cartels, with a more measured and targeted policy; yet homicides and violence will nonetheless continue to steadily mount.

March 9, 2014
Knights Templar leader Nazario "El Más Loco" Moreno is killed by *marinos*.

March 4, 2015
Hard-pressed Zeta Cartel leader Omar (Z-42) Treviño Morales is arrested outside Monterrey, but most members refuse to accept his 38-year-old nephew's succession, so that this once all-powerful crime syndicate collapses into feuding factions.

January 19, 2017
"El Chapo" Guzmán is extradited to be tried before the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn, his trial not actually commencing until November 2018.

April 12, 2018
The American reward for recapturing recently-released kingpin Rafael Caro

Quintero is raised to $20 million, and his name is added to the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list.

May 26, 2018
Marinos detain Rosalinda González Valencia, wife of Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel leader Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera, and reputedly in charge of that criminal organization's finances.

September 25, 2018
Marinos and soldiers, as well as federal and state agents, disarm all of Acapulco's municipal policemen "because of suspicion that the force had probably been infiltrated by criminal groups."

January 30, 2019
Newly-installed President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announces that his administration will no longer hunt drug lords:

> *We haven't arrested capos, because that is not our main function. The government's main function is to guarantee public safety, and the strategy is no longer to carry out raids . . . Officially there isn't a war anymore.*

February 12, 2019
"El Chapo" Guzmán is found guilty on all counts by a jury in New York.

Glossary

***adormidera*—**"sleep-inducing" or "soporific"; formal synonym for "narcotics" used by senior government officials in public statements.

aguachile—Sinaloan shrimp dish (similar to *ceviche*) made with lime, salt, onion, cucumber, chili, and pepper, usually served with ice-cold beer; the phrase *comer aguachile* or to "eat aguachile" being a local expression for "living the good life."

bazuco or bazuko—from the English word "bazooka," in Mexico's drug-culture signifying marijuana laced with cocaine.

brazo derecho—"right arm," metaphor for the second-in-command or "right-hand man" of any organization, usually identifying a cartel's *sicario* commander.

***buchón*—**disparaging epithet in Sinaloa for any *nouveau-riche* drug dealer (or female consort) who parade their wealth with vulgar displays of jewelry, in particular garish gold necklaces piled high on their chests—like the puffy *buchón* or "pouch" of some birds.

burrero—"donkey drover," which among traffickers is applied to small-time smugglers who carry their own narcotic-bundles across the border on foot, or at the head of a column of bearers; many drug barons, such as Pedro Díaz Parada of Oaxaca, began their careers as lowly *burreros*.

***calentar la plaza*—**"heat up the plaza," a cartel tactic of escalating attacks in a rival's territory, so as to attract a greater police presence and thereby hinder their money-making activities.

***capo*—**term inexpertly lifted from the Italian and indiscriminately applied in Mexico to any drug lord or high-ranking boss.

***cártel*—**modern spelling (with a stress accent above its first vowel) for any large criminal organization dealing in illicit narcotics, so as to distinguish it from the older, unaccented word *cartel*, which simply means a "poster."

***charola*—**"tray," witticism for an undercover policeman's badge, which implies that it can be flipped open to receive payments, like the small tray presented with a restaurant or nightclub's bill.

***chicharrear*—**"sizzle" as in cooking; pork fat fried in this fashion resulting in morsels called *chicharrones* ("pork rinds" or "cracklings"); but in the criminal underworld, a euphemism for burning tender parts of a prisoner's anatomy as torture.

***chivatazo*—**slang for a "tip-off" or "warning," usually implying that a recipient

should leave before the arrival of an impending threat, or act swiftly to take advantage of a fleeting opportunity [see also "pitazo"].

***comando*—**"squad" or "unit," *comando suicida* being a "suicide squad;" *comando de información* an "intelligence unit;" *comando terrorista* a "terrorist cell;" etc.; in Mexico's drug wars, a term applied to both special forces assault-teams and cartel hit-squads.

estaca—term of military origin, applied among cartels to squads of four to six armed *sicarios* who patrol in vehicles, or escort superiors as bodyguards.

***focas*—**"seals," euphemism for youthful lookouts roaming the streets of cartel plazas, ready to raise the alarm against any perceived threat—just like the marine mammals that bark loudly whenever an interloper approaches their resting area.

***fogones*—**kitchen "burners" or "heating elements," but which in the criminal underworld means burning sensitive spots on a victim's body as punishment or torture.

***grapa*—**gram of narcotics; in February 2013, a Federal Preventive Police tactical-weapons *comandante* commented to a reporter that underage Mexico City street-dealers could earn "more than 300 pesos a day, depending upon how many *grapas* they succeed in selling."

***grulla*—**harsh disciplinary measure among certain paramilitary groups like the Zetas, whereby a miscreant's hands and feet are bound, then he is left facedown for two or three days without being fed.

***hormiga* or *a la hormiga*—**"ant-like," a witticism meaning to perform a task on a very small scale, such as smuggling a pound of heroin across the border once a month in a shoe.

***Juaritos*—**Northern Mexican nickname for the long-suffering city of Juárez, Chihuahua, cruelly racked by years of cartel violence.

***levantón*—**"big lift," the abduction of an individual for whom no ransom will be asked, only torture and death awaiting him, such victims being known as *levantados*.

***los de la letra*—**"those of the letter," euphemism spoken fearfully of the dreaded Zetas ("Z" being the last letter of the alphabet), known to have many informants and a predilection for punishing critics.

***maña*—**generic word for "dexterity, skill, cunning, or shrewdness," often applied to manipulative businessmen, con-men, sneak thieves, pickpockets, burglars, etc.; but in modern Mexico, a pseudonym for the drug trade.

***Nectar Lima*—**nickname for "Nuevo Laredo" among cartel gunmen in northern Mexico, probably derived from its radio-code initials "N.L."

***ninis*—**aimless teenagers, high school dropouts with no employment prospects, the scholar Juan Villoro pointing out they constitute an endless supply of cartel *sicarios*, "not because they are of a demonic disposition," but rather that "the most rational, sensible option before them is to enter into drug trafficking."

***ondeado*—**slang expression for anyone not entirely in their right mind: in other words, addled, muddled, distracted, deranged, etc., probably derived from the older catchphrase *perdió la onda* or "he lost the wavelength," meaning someone no longer tuned into whatever is happening around them.

***panochón*—**insult in northern Mexico meaning "lazy bastard" or "busybody," but which among *sicarios* is used to deride opponents as "weaklings," implying that they prefer the cowardly tactic of providing intelligence to Navy or Army special-forces, rather than brave their foes in armed combat.

***Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*—**"Mexican Revolutionary Party," another name for the *Mexicles* gang, originally formed by Hispanic inmates in Texas state prisons, and who served as cartel auxiliaries; members joke that their "PRM" initials stand for *Pura Raza Mexicana* or "Pure Mexican Race."

***pepino*—**"cucumber," derisory expression for a Federal *Policía Preventiva* or "Preventive Police" officer.

***perica*—**euphemism for "cocaine," taking a hit of cocaine being *darse un pericazo*, while *perico* is any user who has become addicted.

***pitazo*—**"whistle blast," such as calls made by traffic policemen or sports referees, but in the criminal underworld, a slang expression for a warning or tip-off [see also "chivatazo"].

***polizetas* or *poli-zetas*—**northern Mexican nickname for municipal or state policemen who receive Zeta graft-payments.

***reventar*—**"to burst," signifying the demolition of an opponent's home or buildings, so as to preclude any possible return; when the Zetas drove Jesús "El Chucho" Romo López—longtime Gulf Cartel kingpin in Piedras Negras, Coahuila—from that border city in April 2010, they destroyed his many mansions, leaving them *reventadas* and abandoned.

***sardo*—**derisive nickname for a "soldier," derived from *sardina*, because military personnel are often seen packed tightly together in formations or on trucks, wearing shiny dark helmets above olive-drab uniforms; its diminutive form is *sardito*.

***semáforo rojo*—**"red light" or "red traffic-light," which in violence-plagued cities devoid of adequate news coverage denotes a general "state of alert" against possible dangers. When Navy special-forces killed two opposing drug-bosses in Tamaulipas on April 22, 2017, the "municipal government of Reynosa issued a *semáforo rojo* alert over social media to inform the public of potential risks, and for everyone to be on guard and take precautions."

***sicario*—**nickname for a cartel gunman or assassin, taken from the ancient Latin word *sicarius*, which in Biblical times meant a "dagger man."

***sopear*—**"to dunk," meaning to sop an edible in liquid or hot sauce so as to soften it; but in the criminal underworld, a term meaning to soften up a person for interrogation. When the Guadalajara Cartel ordered the abduction of American DEA agent Enrique Camarena in late January 1985, one of the assembled bosses said that he should be *sopeado*, "so that we can know with whom he's been collaborating."

***tablazos*—**brutal punishment inflicted by drug bosses or their henchmen, by beating disobedient or recalcitrant individuals on their backs and buttocks with *tablas* or "boards."

***testaferro*—**"straw man," a person willing to sign legal documents on behalf of another (usually to conceal a criminal background). In January 2018, a government analyst lamented that the U.S. Treasury's sanctions

against the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel leaders Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera and Abigael González Valencia had failed "to affect their operational capacity, because here in Mexico they retain their properties, partners, and *testaferros*."

***topón*—**noun meaning to "bump into," a chance encounter between two armed groups resulting in gunfire. The media in Navolato, Sinaloa, reported how *sicarios* aboard four pickups unexpectedly had a *topón* on Avenida Defensa Nacional at 5:00 a.m. on a quiet Sunday in 2016 with a column of 15 armored Humvees bearing naval special-forces, who scattered the frightened gunmen in a hail of bullets, seizing all four of their trucks.

***transizetas* or *transi-zetas*—**nickname in northern Mexico for traffic policemen who receive Zeta graft to monitor drug-shipments, ensuring that the corresponding *derechos de piso* "tax" has been paid to their *plaza* bosses.

***última letra, los de la*—**"those of the last letter," a guarded way of referring to the cruel Zetas, "Z" being the last letter of the alphabet.

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Index

Note: Page numbers in **bold** refer to main entries.

Aerial spraying. *See* "Condor," Operation
Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI), **1–4**, 161, 211, 246, 257, 295
  and corruption, 1, 271, 286
  creation and activation of (2000–2002), 2
  disappointment and deactivation (2003–2012), 2–3
  and Fox Quesada, Vicente, 2, 117
  and Mata Zetas, 219
  Policía Federal Ministerial (2012–present), 3–4
  Policía Judicial Federal (1908–2002), 2–3
  UEDO replaced by, 268
Aguacates, Cártel de los (1980–1989), **4–6**
  emergence as Milenio Cartel (1990s), 5–6
  foundation and early years (1980–1989), 4–5
AK-47 assault rifle (1947–present), **6–9**
  black market arms trade (2000–present), 8–9
  cuerno de chivos, 7, 8, 296
  historical evolution (1947–1959), 6–7
  introduction into Mexico (1960s–1970s), 7
  restriction and criminal embrace (1972–present), 7–8
Allende massacre (2011), **9–12**, 304
  aftermath (April 2011–present), 11–12
  background (2010–2011), 9–10
  events (March 18–22, 2011), 10–11
Altamira prison brawl. *See under* Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): civil war
Altiplano Prison (1988–present), **12–13**, 90, 100, 142, 247
  and Cárdenas, Osiel, 289, 292
  "Chapo" Guzmán's incarceration and tunnel escape from, 166–167, 173, 184, 263
Amapola or *amapolero. See* Heroin
Amphetamines. *See* Methamphetamines
Apodaca prison riot. *See under* Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): civil war
AR-15 rifle (1964–present), **13–15**
  historical development (1964–2004), 13
  Sicarios' second most-popular weapon (1992–present), 14
Arellano-Félix organization, **15–24**, 57, 129, 236, 256, 258
  brutal reign (1994–2000), 18–19
  clandestine warfare and fatal blunder (1992–1993), 16–18
  on defensive (2010–present), 23–24
  difficulties and renewed war against El Chapo (2000–2001), 19–20
  early history (1980s–1990), 15

Arellano-Félix (*Cont.*)
first challenges (1991–1992), 16
leadership losses and deterioration (2002–2006), 20–21
repercussions (June 1993–1997), 18
schism and blood feud (2007–2010), 21–23
seizure of power (1989–1990), 15–16
Armored vehicles. *See* Narcotanques
Artistas Asesinos (2002–present), **24–25**, 197, 198, 199
Avocado Cartel. *See* Aguacates, Cártel de los

Badiraguato, **26**
"Barbie." *See* Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie"
Barcina, Operación. *See* Tepic Strafing
Barrett .50-caliber long-range rifle (1982–present), **26–28**
acquisitions in Mexico (2005–present), 27–28
developments (1982–2001), 27
Beheadings (ca. 2004–present), **28–29**, 87, 218–219, 232, 242, 277, 293, 311
Beltrán-Leyva organization, **29–36**
break with El Chapo (2008), 31–32
death of Arturo Beltrán, "Boss of Bosses" (Christmas 2009), 33–34
decline and dissolution (2010–present), 34–35
early years (late 1980s–1996), 29–30
prominence (1997–2007), 30–31
war against Sinaloa Cartel (2008–2009), 32–33
Black-tar heroin. *See* Heroin
Body disposals, **36–38**
bodies intended to be found: *encajuelados, encobijados, encintados, entambados,* 36
bodies intended to disappear: *baños, buisos, licuados,* 36–37
pozoles (2009), 37–38

Caballeros Templarios. *See* Familia Michoacana: reincarnation as Knights Templar
Cabañas shooting (2010), **39–40**
Cadereyta-Jiménez massacre. *See under* Zeta Cartel (2010–2014): civil war
Calderón Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesús (1962–present), **40–43**
antidrug commitment (2006–2012), 41–42
assessment of (2012–present), 42–43
birth and early career (1962–2004), 40
disputed election (2005–2006), 40–41
Camarena Salazar, Enrique S. "Kiki" (1947–1985), **43–50**
abduction, torture, and murder (February 7–9, 1985), 47–48, 63–64, 244
American vengeance (spring 1985), 49–50
attempted deception and recovered remains (March 1985), 48–49
birth and early career (1947–1980), 43
intelligence work in Mexico (1980–1984), 43–45
vulnerability and exposure (June 1984–January 1985), 45–47
Car-bomb, Ciudad Juárez. *See* Juárez Cartel: suffering
Cárdenas Guillén, Osiel (1967–present), **50–57**
conquest of Nuevo Laredo (February–December 2002), 55–56
creation of Los Zetas (October 2000–January 2002), 55
detention in Mexico and United States (2003–present), 56–57
early arrests and incarceration (1989–1995), 51
introduction to drug trafficking (1985–1988), 50–51
murder of "El Chava" Gómez (June–July 1999), 52–53

rise through trafficking ranks (1996–1988), 51–52
street confrontation in Matamoros (November 1999), 53–54
unexpected capture (March 2003), 56
wealth and power (2000–2001), 54–55
Cardinal Posadas murder (1993), **57–58**
Caro Quintero, Rafael (1952–present), **58–67**
abduction and murder of Camarena (February 7–9, 1995), 63–64
birth and impoverished childhood (1952–1969), 58–59
disaster at El Búfalo and unmasking of DEA agent (November 1984–January 1985), 62–63
early successes (1970s–1976), 59
escape of (February 9, 1985), 64
flight to Costa Rica and apprehension (March–April 1985), 64–65
incarceration (1985–2013), 65–66
loss of Fresnillo Grow-Operation and hunt for DEA operative (May 1984), 61–62
marijuana agro-business (1980–1984), 60–61
parole (August 2013), 66
retreat into Guadalajara (1977–1979), 59–60
Carrillo Fuentes, Amado (1956–1977), **67–74**
arrest of (1989–1990), 68–69
birth and early struggles (1956–1979), 67
death of (July 1997), 73–74
initial success (1987–1988), 68
as international fugitive (1996–1997), 72–73
learning cross-border trade (1980–1986), 67–68
as "Lord of the Skies" (1994–1995), 70–71
new trafficking arrangement (1995–1996), 71–72
post-death retributions (November 1997), 74
rise to power (1990–1993), 69–70
Cemetery. *See* Jardines del Humaya Cemetery
Chihuahua Rehab-Center massacre. *See* Juárez Cartel: suffering
CISEN. *See* Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS): supplanted by CISEN
Ciudad Juárez car-bomb attack. *See* Juárez Cartel: suffering
Cocaine, **75–77**
continued trafficking (1996–present), 76
direct Mexican purchases (1995), 76
Mexican trans-shipments (1975–1994), 75–76
Cochiloco, **77**
Colima Cartel (1988–2006), **77–79**
disintegration and aftermath (2006–present), 79
"kings of ecstasy" (ca. 1988–2002), 77–78
origins (1978–1987), 77
survival under Milenio Cartel (2003–2005), 78–79
"Condor," Operation (1975–1987), **79–83**
aerial spraying, 59–60, 80, 82–83, 111, 137, 171
Guadalajara Cartel: emergence (1980), 82–83
Operation "Condor," second phase (1977–1978), 80–82
Operation "Condor," third phase (1982–1987), 83
preliminary phase: Operación "Trizo" or "Clearview" (1975–1976), 80
spraying of Paraquat or Gramoxone, 80, 83
Cuerno de chivo. *See* AK-47 assault rifle: introduction into Mexico
Cuinis, Los (2010–present), **84–90**
background (1980–1996), 84
emergence of "Jalisco Nueva Dirección" (2010–2012), 87–88

Cuinis, Los (*Cont.*)
leadership losses (2015–present), 89–90
leadership role exposed (August 2005), 85–86
retreat and subordination (2006–2009), 86–87
rise within Milenio Cartel (1997–2004), 84–85
rupture (2010), 87
winning trafficking strategy (2012–2014), 88–89

Dead, disposal of the. *See* Body disposals
Decapitation. *See* Beheadings
Derecho de piso, **91–92**
transit fees, 91–92
"protection" payments, 92
Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), **93–96**
creation and early services (1947–1959), 93
expanded operations and decay (1960–1981), 93–94
partners in drug-crime and dissolution (1982–1985), 94–95
supplanted by CISEN (1989–present), 95
"Dragón," Operación (2007). *See* "Ephedrine Intercept"
Drones (2005–present), **96–98**
border patrol drones (2004–present), 96–97
cartel drones (2010–present), 97–98

El Chapo, Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo"
Encajuelado, encobijado, encintado, entambado. See Body disposals
Ephedrine intercept (2007), **98–100**
background (December 2006–February 2007), 98–99
Operation "Dragón" (March 2007), 99–100

Familia Michoacana Cartel (2006–2012), **101–106**
activities as autonomous cartel (September 2006), 102–104
aftermath (2014–2015), 105–106
background (1980s–2005), 101–102
reincarnation as Knights Templar (2011–2013), 104–105
second death of "El Más Loco" (March 2014), 105
FEADS (1997–2003), **106–109**
decline (2001–2002), 108
disbandment and substitution (January 2003), 108–109
resurrection of (1996–1997), 106–107
secondment of military replacements (1997–2000), 107–108
Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel (1946–present), **109–116**
abduction of Enrique Camarena (February–November 1985), 114
allotment of *plazas* (summer 1989), 115–116
birth and early education (1946–1966), 109–110
capture of (April 1989), 114–115
creation of Guadalajara Cartel (1978–1981), 112–113
early drug career and rise (1966–1974), 110
initial Colombian contacts (1975–1977), 110–112
internment of (November 1990), 116
investigation into (1982–1984), 113–114
Fox Quesada, Vicente (1942–present), **116–118**
birth and early career (1942–1987), 116–117
political rise of (1988–1999), 117
presidential tenure (December 2000–December 2006), 117–118
Fuel thefts. *See* Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–present): fuel thefts

GAFE (1986–present), **119–130**
Aponte Gómez, Manuel Alejandro, desertion of (2004–2014), 126–128
arresting cartel bosses (2002–2005), 125–126
assorted operations (2006–2009), 128–129
congregation and stabilization (2001–2004), 124–125
first defections (1998–2000), 123–124
Fuerza de Intervención Rápida (1986), 119
peacetime "Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales" (1990–1994), 119–120
sagging morale and contraction (2006–2007), 126
secondment as federal police officers (1997–2000), 122–123
supplanted by naval special-forces (Christmas 2009), 129–130
wartime expansion (1995–1997), 120–122
GANFE (1998–2007), **130–133**
desertion of Carlos Manuel "El Cóndor" Hoo Ramírez, 132–133
foundation and complications (1999–2006), 131–132
historical backdrop (1994–1998), 130–131
transfer from army to navy control (2007–present), 132
García Ábrego, Juan (1944–present), **133–136**
arrest and deportation (1996), 136
birth and early criminal life (1944–1970s), 133–134
Cali cocaine-contact (1991–1993), 135
entry into trafficking (mid–1970s–1986), 134
rise to power (1987–1990), 134–135
seizure of power (1994–1995), 135–136
Gasoline thefts. *See* Zetas Vieja Escuela: fuel thefts
Gente Nueva. *See under* Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo": war for Ciudad Juárez
Goma or *gomero. See* Heroin
Guadalajara Cartel (1978–1985), **137–139**
background (1977–1982), 137–138
dissolution (1985–1989), 139
emergence of (ca. 1980–1981), 82–83, 138
fata act (1982–1985), 138–139
and Operation Godfather, 138
See also Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel
Guiso. See Body disposals
Gulf Cartel (1987–present), **139–146**
arms importation (2008), 143
civil war and death of Tony Tormenta (March 2010–November 2011), 144–145
decline and near defeat (December 2011–February 2015), 145–146
emergence as Gulf Cartel under Juan García Ábrego (1987–1996), 140–141
origins under Juan Nepomuceno Guerra (1930s–1986), 140
Project "reckoning" (September 2008), 142–143
rupture with Zetas (December 2008–January 2010), 143–144
troubled tenure under Tony Tormenta (2003–2007), 142
zenith under Osiel Cárdenas Guillén (1999–2003), 141–142
Guzmán Decena, Arturo: founder of the Zetas (1976–2002), **146–153**
assault on Nuevo Laredo (February–November 2002), 152–153
birth and early military career (1976–1996), 146–147
death of (November 2002), 153
enhanced training (2001), 151–152
initial criminal affiliations (1998–1999), 148–149

Guzmán Decena (*Cont.*)
murder of "El Chava" Gómez (June–July 1999), 149–150
recruiting first Zetas (2000), 150–151
secondment as federal judicial agent (1997), 147–148
Guzmán Loera, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo" (1957–present), **153–170**
attacks on his family (June–August 2016), 168–169
birth and difficult childhood (1957–1972), 153–154
break with Beltráns and murder of his son (January–May 2008), 164–165
creation of "Sinaloa Cartel" (ca. 1990), 155–156
dining out (early November 2007), 163
extradition and conviction (2017–present), 169
first prison escape (January 2001), 160
flight into Central America and detention (May–June 1993), 157–159
fugitive and plotter (February–September 2001), 160–161
and *Gente Nueva* ("New People"), 163–164, 196, 197, 200
hostilities with Arellanos (1991–1992), 156–157
imprisonment (1993–2001), 159–160
independence and first "narco tunnel" (1985–1998), 155
introduction to drug trade (1972–1980), 154
learning the business (1981–1988), 154–155
near-assassination at Guadalajara airport (May 1993), 157
offensives against Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, and Ciudad Juárez (2002–2006), 161–162
re-creation of "La Federación" (October 2001), 161
recapture of (2014), 165–166
second recapture (January 2016), 167–168
third marriage (summer 2007), 162–163
tunnel-escape from El Altiplano (July 2015), 166–167
war for Ciudad Juárez (late 2007–2008), 163–164

Heroin, **171–173**
amapola or *amapolero,* 171
black-tar heroin (mid–1990s–2009), 172
brown heroin (1946–early 1990s), 172
goma or *gomero,* 172
historical background, 171
Mexican poppy cultivation, 171–172
white heroin (2010–present), 173
Horizontes del Sur Slaughter. *See* Juárez Cartel: suffering
Huachicolero. See Zeta Vieja Escuela: fuel thefts
Humaya Cemetery. *See* Jardines del Humaya Cemetery

Iguala mass abduction (September 2014), **174–175**
aftermath (September 2014–present), 174–175
police intervention (September 26, 2014), 174
Infantería de Marina (2007–present), **175–185**
American endorsement of (February 2011–August 2012), 183–184
escalation (2008–2009), 178–180
high-profile captures (2012–2015), 184
inter-service competition (2007–2008), 177–178
killing Arturo Beltrán (December 2009), 181–182
Marino armaments (2009), 180–181

struggle for relevancy (1980s–2004), 175–177
tactical units (2008), 180
undistinguished historical background (1821–1980), 175
widespread approval of (December 2009–January 2011), 182–183

Jalisco Nueva Generación, Cártel (2010–present), **186–189**
emergence of (2010), 186–187
Operativo or Operación "Jalisco" (2015), 187–189
Jardines del Humaya Cemetery, **189–190**
Jesús Malverde (1909–present), **190–191**
legend of (1870–1909), 190
popular "sainthood" of (1910–present day), 190–191
Journalism, **191–193**
cartel intimidation of, 192–193
criminal manipulation of, 191–192
Juárez Cartel (1985–present), **193–201**
Cadereyta-Jiménez car-bomb, 198–199
Chihuahua rehab-center massacre, 198
emergence under Aguilar Guajardo (1985–1992), 194–195
first hostilities with Sinaloans (2004), 196
reduced status (2011–present), 199–200
suffering (2010), 198–199
usurpation and preeminence under Amado Carrillo (1993–1997), 195
Vicente Carrillo's troubled succession (1997–2003), 195–196
war for Ciudad Juárez (2007–2009), 196–198

Kaibiles (1974–present), **202–207**
border deployment (2012), 206–207
earliest deployments and clouded reputation (1978–1988), 202–204
first Zeta affiliations and recruitment (2002–2007), 204–206
foundation (1974–1975), 202
Mexican Army and Naval Kaibiles (1987–2012), 204
Zeta expansion into Guatemala (2007–2011), 206

La Barbie. *See* Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbi"
Lazcano, Heriberto "Z-3" (1974–2012), **208–216**
assuming Zeta command (November 2004–February 2007), 212
birth and early military service (1974–1997), 208
death (October 2012), 215–216
falling-out with Gulf Cartel (January 2010–May 2012), 213–214
first criminal affiliations (1998–1999), 209–211
Gulf Cartel soldier (February 2002–October 2004), 211–212
narrow escapes and mounting suspicion (March 2007–January 2010), 212–213
secondment as a federal judicial agent (1997–1998), 208–209
Zeta Cartel fracture (June 2012), 215
Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos (1972–present), **216–217**
"Lord of the Skies." *See* Carrillo Fuentes, Amado

Mano con Ojos (2010–2011), **218–219**
Mantas. *See* Narcomantas or narcomensajes
Marinos. See Infantería de Marina
Mass graves. *See* Body disposals
Mata Zetas or Matazetas (2005–2015), **219–222**
first video appearance (May 2005), 219–220

Mata Zetas or Matazetas (*Cont.*)
Grupo Matazetas in war for Acapulco (August 2005–September 2006), 220–221
Jalisco Nueva Generación Revival (Summer–Spring 2012), 221–222
transitory resurrection (June 2009), 221
Methamphetamines, **222–224**
and Colima Cartel, 77
drones used for, 97
early Mexican production (1993–2006), 223
and Los Cuinis, 84, 88
manufacturing of, 99–100
and Milenio Cartel, 224–226
relationship to amphetamines, 222–223
Sinaloa Cartel dominance (2007–present), 223–224
Milenio Cartel (1990–2010), **224–233**
Avocados Cartel transformation cartel (1990–2001), 224–225
challenges, defeats, and retreat (2002–2005), 226–229
exposure (1998–2001), 225–226
nominal resuscitation (January 2011), 232
subordination and dissolution (2006–2011), 230–232
targeted leadership (August 2005), 229–230
Monterrey Casino Attack (August 2011), **233**
background (January–May 2011), 233
firebomb attack (August 2011), 233
Mossberg shotgun, **234**
appearance in Mexico (2009–present), 234
development (1960–2001), 234
Mossberg Model 590A1, 181, 234

Narco-saints. *See* Jesús Malverde; San Judas; Santa Muerte; Santería
Narco-submarines. *See* Submarines
Narcocorridos, **235–236**
historical background, 235
narcocorridos norteños, 235–236
written about El Chapo, 160, 235–236
Narcomantas or narcomensajes, **236–237**
Narcotanques, 214, **237–240**, 303
blindados or "armored vehicles," 3, 32, 237, 239–240
narcotanques monstruos or "monster narco-tanks" (2010–2018), 238–239, 303
overview: defensive and offensive armored vehicles, 237–238
recent revival (July–August 2018), 239
Naval special forces. *See* Infantería de Marina
Noreste, Cártel del (2012–present), **240–243**
devastation (2016–present), 242–243
emergence (2015), 241–242
foundation (1990s–2001), 240–241

Oaxaca Cartel (1976–2006), **244–248**
Columbian connection (1996–2006), 245–246
decline and withdrawal (2005–2007), 246–247
disappearance (2007–present), 247
early history (1965–1976), 244
emergence (1977–1984), 244
first convictions (1985–1992), 244–245

Paraquat. *See* "Condor," Operation
Petroleum thefts. *See* Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–present): fuel thefts
Plaza, **248–250**
Félix Gallardo, Miguel Ángel, allotment of *plazas*, 115–116
Policía Judicial. See under Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI)
Poppy. *See* Heroin
Pozole. See Body disposals

San Judas, **251**
Santa Muerte, **251–252**

Santería, **252–254**
historical background (1960s–1988), 252
Narcosatánicos de Matamoros (April 1989), 253
police santeros (April 1989), 253
Sinaloa Cartel. *See* Guzmán Loera, Joaquín: creation of the Sinaloa Cartel
Submarines, **254**

Tanks. *See* Narcocorridos
Tepic Strafing (2017), **254–256**
background (September 2017), 254
Barcina, Operación, 255
public firefight (February 2017), 255
Tijuana or Arellano Cartel (1989–present), **256–259**
brutal reign (1994–1999), 257
deterioration, rupture, and internal warfare (2003–2010), 258
difficulties, renewed war, and leadership losses (2000–2002), 257–258
diminished strength (2011–present), 258–259
disputed usurpation by the Arellanos (1989–1993), 256–257
Tunnels, **259–265**
background and challenges of tunneling, 259
El Chapo's escape outlets (2001–2016), 262–263
El Chapo's first narco-tunnel (1987), 259–260
El Chapo's grand escape-tunnel (July 2015), 263–264
Huachicolero tunnel (2018), 265
modern tunneling (2015–present), 264–265
rival tunnels (1993–2015), 260–262

UEDO (1996–2003), **266–267**
creation and checkered history (1996–2003), 266–267
dissolution (2003), 268
UNAPROP (2013–present), **267–268**
Unión Tepito, Cártel de la (2008–2018), **268–269**
used in GAFE aerial support, 122

Valdez Villarreal, Édgar "La Barbie" (1973–present), **269–278**
birth and early misdeeds (1973–1997), 269
capture and extradition (August 2010), 277–278
Cartel War and retreat (spring–summer 2002), 270–271
first "Mata Zetas" executions (May 2005–February 2006), 274–275
flight into Mexico and introduction to drug smuggling, 269–270
offensives to reclaim Nuevo Laredo (2004–2005), 272–274
savage defense of Acapulco (February–September 2006), 275
savage defense of Acapulco (May 2008–January 2010), 276
short-lived cartel (2010), 276–277
Sinaloa Cartel affiliation (autumn 2002–autumn 2003), 271–272

Zeta original gunmen (1997–2003), **279–292**
army deserters (1997–1998), 279–280
battle for Nuevo Laredo (February 2002–February 2003), 286–288
coalescence (2000–2001), 282–283
code numbers, 279
enhanced training (2001), 283–284
identities by code numbers, 280–281
recruitment as cartel mercenaries (1999), 280–282
technological superiority, 285–286
unexpected capture of Osiel Cárdenas (March 2003), 288–289
wider-ranging strikes (April–August 2003), 289–290

Zeta Gulf Cartel soldiers (2004–2009), **292–301**
Guatemalan invasion (2007–2010), 299–301
"La Expansión" (2007), 299
long-range hit teams (January–April 2004), 292–293
Operation "Cuerno de Chivo" (November 2004), 295–296
renewed long-range strikes (May–August 2005), 296–298
renewed trouble in Nuevo Laredo (spring 2004), 293
resentment surge (summer–autumn 2004), 294–295
savage war for Acapulco (August 2005–September 2006), 298–299
stillborn rescue-Plan (December 2004–January 2005), 296
war and change of command (winter 2004–2005), 295
Zeta Cartel (2010–2014), **301–309**
Altamira prison brawl, 305
Apodaca prison riot, 305
Cadereyta-Jiménez massacre, 305
capture of the Treviño Morales brothers (June 2013–March 2015), 307–308
civil war (January 2020–September 2011), 305
conquest of Coahuila (2009–2010), 302–303
death of Heriberto Lazcano (October 2012), 307
disintegration (April–November 2015), 308
fragmentation and decline (2012–present), 305–307
rising tensions (December 2008–March 2009), 301–302
Zeta Vieja Escuela (2014–present), **309–314**
fuel thefts (summer 2017–present), 313
inclusive Guerra Zeta or "Zeta War" (2016–2017), 310–313
lingering vestiges (2018–present), 313–314
origins (2014–2015), 309–310

About the Author

David F. Marley is a historian who lived in Mexico City for more than three decades, researching and teaching at such institutions as the Colegio de Mexico and Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia. His published works include ABC-CLIO's *Wars of the Americas: A Chronology of Armed Conflict in the Western Hemisphere* (2008) and *Mexico at War: From the Struggle for Independence to the 21st-Century Drug Wars* (2014).